Table of Contents

1. Allegiances
2. Prologue
3. Chapter 1 (Dashkit)
4. Chapter 2 (Wispkit)
5. Chapter 3 (Juniperkit)
6. Chapter 4 (Jadekit)
7. Chapter 5 (Spiritkit)
8. Chapter 6 (Wispkit)
9. Chapter 7 (Juniperkit)
10. Chapter 8 (Jadekit)
11. Chapter 9 (Jadekit)
12. Chapter 10 (Juniperkit)
13. Chapter 11 (Spiritpaw)
14. Chapter 12 (Jadepaw)
15. Chapter 13 (Juniperpaw)
16. Chapter 14 (Spiritpaw)
17. Chapter 15 (Wisppaw)
18. Chapter 16 (Jadepaw)
19. Chapter 17 (Jadepaw)
20. Chapter 18 (Spiritpaw)
21. Chapter 19 (Juniperpaw)
22. Chapter 20 (Juniperpaw)
23. Chapter 21 (Whisppaw)
24. Epilogue

Allegiances

ShadeClan

Leader Nightfrost- black tom with icy cold blue eyes, mate: Fawncall

Second in Command Blazeshimmer- battle-scarred, large ginger tabby tom, mate: Squirreltail

Third in Command Hollowclaw- brown tom with razor sharp claws, was a stolen kit, mate: Whitesky

Fourth in Command Lightningstrike- black she-cat with jagged yellow stripes on flank

Thieves

Pineneedle- brown tabby she-cat with brilliant green eyes, mate: Tigerblaze

Squirreltail- brown-and-gray she-cat with a bushy tail, mate: Blazeshimmer

Thundercloud- yellow-and-black tabby tom, mate: Lizardheart

Whitesky- white she-cat with bright blue eyes, mate: Hollowclaw

Learners

Hollypaw- black she-cat

Fighters

Lionfang- scruffy yellow tom

Tigerblaze- ginger-and-black tabby tom, mate: Pineneedle

Hailfall- white tom with icy blue eyes, mate: Palebird

Lizardheart- brown-and-ginger female, mate: Thundercloud

Healers

Fawncall- small brown she-cat with white spots on back, mate: Nightfrost

Queens

Lizardheart- expecting Thundercloud's kittens

Fawncall- expecting Nightfrost's kittens

Locaters

Silverwing- lithe silver tabby she-cat

Oceansplash- dark gray, with a bluish tint, she-cat with dark blue eyes splashed with a lighter blue

Learners

Blazepaw- dark ginger tom

Hunters

Greenstream- light footed brown tabby she-cat with bright green eyes, mate: Blackfang

Blackfang- black tabby tom, mate: Greenstream

Guards

Brownclaw- brown tabby tom, mate: Oceansplash

Learners

Treepaw- brown-and-and-cream she-cat with amber eyes

Elders

Moonspots- yellow tom with gray patches

Stolen Kits

Orangekit- long-furred orange tabby she-cat, four moons

Sharpkit- white-and-brown tabby tom, four moons

Dashkit- large dark ginger tabby tom with determined golden eyes, one moon

LightClan

Leader Lightstar- pure white she-cat with friendly, light green eyes, mate: Sharptooth (5 lives)

Deputy Solarburst- black tom with bursts of orange and red, mate: Goldenfleck

Medicine Cat Yellowlily- light yellow she-cat

Warriors

Russetstream- russet she-cat, mate: Gingerleg (queen)

Sharptooth- sturdy brown tabby tom with unusually long, sharp fangs, mate: Lightstar

Goldenfleck- gray she-cat with golden flecks, mate: Solarburst

Learners

Songpaw- pure white she-cat

Timberpaw- large brown tabby tom

Glowingpaw- silky bluish-black she-cat

Rescuers

Palebird- pale orange she-cat, mate: Hailfall (queen)

Flightheart- yellow tabby she-cat, mate: Runningstorm (queen)

Gingerleg- black tom with a ginger leg, mate: Russetleaf

Runningstorm- dark, stormy gray tom, mate: Flightheart

Learners

Emberpaw- light ginger she-cat

Smokepaw- smoky gray tom

Winterpaw- white tom with fierce blue eyes

Rosepaw- rosy ginger she-cat

Searchers

Honeywind- golden-and-white tabby she-cat

Darkberry- pitch black tom with berry blue eyes

Learners

Dewpaw- pale silver she-cat

Wavepaw- silver she-cat with bluish stripes

Spies

Ivyheart- brown and silver tabby she-cat

Shellfang- white tom with silver stripes

Hailfall- currently spy in ShadeClan

Learners

Sandpaw- sandy gray tom

Flamepaw- dark ginger tabby tom

Queens

Flightheart- mother of Hailfall's kits: Sunkit (white tom with yellow stripes) and Sweetkit (white she-cat)

Russetstream- mother of Gingerleg's kits: Blazekit (bright russet tom), Wispkit (slender black she-cat with orange and red flecks) and Lifekit (orange she-cat)

Flightheart- expecting Runningstorm's kits

Rescued Kits

Bluekit- bluish she-cat

Tigerkit- dark orange tom with black stripes

Amberkit- brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Petalkit- white she-cat with pinkish eyes

Heatherkit- wiry brown tabby she-cat with fierce heather blue eyes

SilverClan

Leader Sweetstar- ginger-and-white she-cat, 8 lives

Deputy Russetleaf- russet she-cat

Medicine Cat Softheart- silky-furred white she-cat with a willowy tail

Warriors

Brightstream- light yellow she-cat with ginger stripes

Sharpfang- light tan tom, mate: Willowtree

Twilightberry- gray and silver tabby tom, mate: Beechdawn

Willowtree- brown she-cat with long silky fur, mate: Sharpfang (queen)

Firefur- dark ginger tom, mate: Rosethorn

Foxhowl- shaggy ginger tom with a white tail tip, mate: Gingerpelt

Beechdawn- sandy brown she-cat with orange-amber eyes, mate:

Twilightberry

Gingerpelt- pale ginger tabby she-cat, mate: Foxhowl

Graydapple- dappled gray tom

Rosethorn- brown-and-ginger she-cat, mate: Firefur (queen)

Queens

Rosethorn, mother of Firefur's kits: Juniperkit (sickly brown she-cat with dull green eyes) and Dashkit (see ShadeClan stolen kits)

Willowtree, expecting Sharpfang's kits

Talia's Adoption Center

Leader Talia- long furred dark gray she-cat, mate: Forest (queen)

Advisor Cindertree- dark gray she-cat with dark green eyes

Followers

Ginger- ginger she-cat

Forest- dark brown tabby tom with forest green eyes, mate: Talia

Ava- lithe silver tabby she-cat

Apprentice- Darkpaw

Leafrustle- dark brown tom with dark, leafy green eyes, mate: Palestripe

Finders

Palestripe- dark golden she-cat with paler stripes, mate: Leafrustle (queen)

Apprentices

Darkpaw- pure black tom

Queens

Talia- mother of Forest's kits: Sorrelkit (reddish-brown she-cat), Eclispekit (dark gray and yellow tom) and Cloverkit (brown tabby she-cat with clover green eyes)

Palestripe- expecting Leafrustle's kits

Kits up for adoption

Firekit- dark ginger tabby tom, five moons

Yellowkit- blind yellow she-cat, two moons (must be adopted with Jadekit)

Jadekit- large yellow tabby tom with jade green eyes, two moons (must be adopted with Yellowkit)

Maplekit- maple brown she-cat, 3 moons

Heatherkit- pale golden-brown she-cat with slightly darker stripes and heather colored eyes, 1 moon

Prologue

A large black tom crouched on top of a small cliff that over looked a small clearing. his tail flicking eagerly, beside him, crouched five other cats. All six of them stared intently down into the small clearing where multiple cats were preparing for their morning duties. The black tom looked up at the rising sun, the sky was streaked crimson and the tom smiled a cruel vicious smile. It was a sign; on this day, much blood would be spilled. He unsheathed his claws and sunk them deep into the ground, his muscles rippled under his sleak pelt as he flexed them in anticipation. The dawn patrol had now left; this would be the time to strike. When there weren't as many enemies around. With a blood curdling screech, the tom leapt off of the cliff, easily landing in the middle of the clearing, the rest of the cats following. Startled yowls rushed through the unprepared cats, his tail lashed and he leapt onto the nearest cat. It was a dark ginger tom, and all around him; his cats started fighting against their enemy. He let out a crazed cackle as he dug his claws deep into the tom's flank. He screeched in pain and he released him, only to slam his claws down into the back of the ginger cat's head, the tom gasped before collapsing to the ground.

"Is that all you got?" the stronger cat taunted, his tail swishing eagerly. "This is hardly worth it."

He glanced up, his followers were badly outnumbered and despite their immense strength, they were being beaten. The black tom brought his paw down onto the tom's neck, pressing it down threateningly. "Where are your kits!" he hissed loudly, the camp falling silent. "Bring out your kits or he gets it."

The enemy warriors shifted worriedly, unsure, before giving in. A slim ginger-and-white she-cat made her way to a well fortified den and brought out two small kits, a brown she-cat and a dark ginger tabby tom. The mother, a brown-and-ginger she-cat, followed. She was protesting angrily, that they were her kits and

that they didn't deserve what would happen to them. A plump silky furred she-cat followed, her eyes filled with both worry and relief.

"Place them in front of me," the tom commanded, by now his cats had returned to his side. "Let me see them."

With great reluctance, the ginger-and-white she-cat pushed forward the two terrified kits. The brown one was a sickly looking thing, with rather pale and ruffled fur. Her green eyes were large and dull, proof that she had recently fought an illness and barely won with her life. The other on the other hand looked healthy with fluffy dark ginger kit fur that reflected his health. His eyes were a deep, dark gold. They appeared to be around a moon old, the brown kit much smaller than her age while the ginger was unusually large. He would make a strong warrior one day. "In exchange in your warrior's life, I will take this ginger tabby!" he snarled.

Outraged yowls rippled through the small clan, many warriors made an attempt to jump him, but his own followers easily pushed them away. "Is this tom's life not worth it?" he called, silence followed his words. "Hand over the kit, and I will let this tom live."

The mother of the kit stepped forward, pain glowing in her eyes. "Take him…" she chocked out. "Just, don't harm him."

"Why would I harm such a strong kit?" the tom scoffed and he signaled for the smaller of his assembled forces, a black she-cat who looked to be around eight moons. She stepped up to the kit and picked him up, he protested slightly, before going limp. The kits gaze wondered helplessly towards his Clan mates. He let out a sad, lonely cry as he was carried away.

"Thank you for the business," the black cat laughed.

"Now, let her go," the clan's leader snapped. "Let him up."

"Not until they're gone," the tom hissed, his gaze following his apprentice who was now being lead away by another cat who had been waiting in the shadows the entire time. His blue eyes glowed triumphantly when the two left the camp. Smiling, he

forced the tom over onto his back, exposing his soft throat.

"NOOOO!" the leader cried as he brought his claws down against the tom's throat.

"I just promised I wouldn't kill him, not harm him," the tom laughed, his smile widening. "Thank you for the business."

Yet again, chaos burst out as cats began to fight again. The black tom pranced about, laughing as he fought against his foes. His flank was bleeding heavily, his heart beating fiercely with adrenalin. He heard a roar from behind and whipped around to face the ginger-and-white she-cat as she charged him. Her claws fully unsheathed, she leapt, meaning to deal a killing blow. The tom easily sidestepped the enraged she-cat, and while she stabilized herself, he smashed his claws into her shoulder. She stumbled falling sideways and exposed her soft underbelly and throat. Grinning, the tom ripped his claws down her belly. She cried out painfully, blood seeping out and her white patches turning red.

"Retreat!" the tom called out, satisfied with the damage he had dealt on this small Clan. "Retreat!"

Chapter 1 (Dashkit)

I let out a soft groan and pushed at the moss that was underneath me. It wasn't like the usually soft moss from SilverClan, something was wrong. I sat up quickly and forced open my tired eyes. I was in a large cave with itchy, pale moss underneath me. I glanced around wildly, this wasn't the SilverClan nursery. My claws worked nervously on the moss beneath me. Where was I?

"Ah, he's awake!" I heard a soft purr from a cat behind me. I whipped around; my fur starting to bunch up when I realized it was just a kit, probably a couple of moons older than me. She had long, well-kept, silky orange tabby fur and wide, innocent blue eyes.

"Good for him," was a grumpy response from another kit farther back in the cave.

"Say, say what's your name?" the she-cat continued. "I'm Orangekit and the grumpy fur ball over there," she waved her tail vaguely towards the tom in the corner, "is Sharpkit."

My gaze traveled shyly between the two cats, Sharpkit's annoyed gaze glared back at me when I met his eyes. "I-I'm Dashkit," I mumbled. "Where am I exactly?"

"We're in ShadeClan!" Orangekit squeaked. "You're new Clan."

"New Clan? But SilverClan is my Clan," I protested. "How can I have a new Clan?"

"New-bees," Sharpkit snorted. "Don't you get it? You. Were. STO-LEN! End of Story, comprenday?"

"I… I was stolen," I echoed, a panic starting to seep into my voice. "You mean I won't see SilverClan again?"

“Unless you’re taken on a raid to attack them,” Orangekit shrugged. “We were stolen too…”

“No, I want to go back!” I protested. “I want to go back!”

“Great StarClan, why’d they have to take such a whiner,” Sharpkit sighed. “Look here, life ain’t fair, live with it.”

My eyes started to glaze over and my body started to shake all over. This couldn’t be happening, how could this be happening?

“Get a grip will you,” Sharpkit snorted and he smacked me on the side of my head. “They abandoned you, gave you away without a second thought.”

I froze and turned to face Sharpkit. “My Clan wouldn’t do that!” I spat, but now that he mentioned it, a faint memory threatened to resurface in my mind, SilverClan facing off against a much smaller group of cats. The black leader having Firefur, my father, pinned under his claws, an evil, threatening smile on the cat’s face. I let out a shocked wail and quickly covered my ears with my paws. “It can’t be true! My Clan would never do that!”

Orangekit gently rested her furry tail on my shoulder, murmuring comforting words into my ears. Sharpkit spat coldly and stalked off to the back of the den again, shooting one more dark glare at me in the process.

“We felt that way too,” Orangekit mumbled. “But this is your Clan now, please understand.”

“I-I’ll try,” I sniffled, could it really be so? Did my Clan really abandon me? “What happened to Firefur?” I asked out loud.

“Firefur?” Orangekit echoed curiously.

“He’s my father, the last time I saw him was when he was pinned down by the largest black cat I had ever seen,” I meowed. “Do you know what happened to him?”

“If I recall correctly… I overheard one of ShadeClan’s fighters talking about the fight. He was going on about how our leader, that big tom you saw, showed no mercy against that ginger

tom," Orangekit explained, sympathy glowing in her blue eyes. "Oh Dashkit, I'm so sorry."

"Y-you mean he's dead?" I gasped. "But Firefur was so strong… what about Juniperkit and Rosethorn?"

"Are they family too?" Orangekit asked.

"Yah, my sister and mother," I meowed quickly. "Please tell me!"

"Um… I heard nothing about those two; they're probably okay though…"

"Thank StarClan," I sighed, even if it wasn't 100% accurate, it was something to go off of.

Right then, a brown tabby face peered into the den and his eyes locked onto me. He pulled away and a loud announcement came. "The kit opened his eyes!"

"Let me see him!" I heard a gruff meow before the same gigantic tom that had, most likely, killed Firefure. His sharp, cold blue eyes landed on me and a dark, menacing smile spread across his face. He stepped closer to me; his paws were almost as big as me. I cowered in front of the large tom, was he going to kill me too?

The tom lifted his paw and I flinched as he placed his paw underneath my chin and lifted my head up. "I see a fire in your eyes…" the tom meowed. "You'll make a promising guard."

I almost sighed in relief when the tom pulled his paw away from me. Satisfied with his examination, he departed from the den, his tail making the ferns blocking the exit rustle.

"What was that about?" I asked once I was sure he was gone.

"He was examining you," Orangekit explained. "To decide on what rank you'll be assigned once you become a learner. Sharpkit will be made into a guard as well, and I'll be a locator."

“Guard? Locator?” I echoed, my whiskers twitching curiously. “What do you mean by that?”

“Well you see, a guard protects stolen kits, like us. A locator finds suitable Clans to steal from and then alerts the Clan so that they can send a Thief,” Orangekit explained.

“Are Thieves cats that steal from the Clans?” I asked.

“Correct,” Orangekit purred before growing serious again. “Thieves are one of the higher ranked Clan members; they’re dangerous to cross paths with.”

“Ah… I see,” I mumbled, trying to organize everything I had learned. “So what’s that black cat’s name?”

“His name is Nightfrost,” Orangekit clarified. “The Clan’s leader.”

“He’s really nice to everyone but the stolen cats,” Sharpkit meowed. “Guess he has high hopes for you, he never complimented a stolen kit before.”

“Eh, really?” I gasped.

“I wonder what he’ll name you,” Orangekit piped in.

“What do you mean? I’m-“

“We know that,” Sharpkit interrupted darkly. “But Nightfrost wants to break away any memories of your past Clan. That includes your name.”

“That’s awful!” I gasped, my ears flattening angrily against my skull.

“Obviously,” Sharpkit snorted.

“So if Orangekit and Sharpkit weren’t your name before, what were they?” I suddenly asked.

“Can’t remember,” Sharpkit shrugged. “We’ve been here for three moons; I can hardly even remember what my mother looked

like let alone my old name."

Orangekit nodded slowly in agreement. "When it first happened, I swore I would never forget… but over the moons I slowly started to forget, until now I can barely remember anything about them."

A sharp pain pushed through my chest; I didn't want that to happen to me, I didn't want to forget SilverClan or my family. "S-so when will he rename me?" I managed to ask my claws working even more furiously on the moss than before.

"Don't know," Sharpkit shrugged. "Sometime today though."

I gulped, oh StarClan don't let this happen, please just make this all a dream! I pleaded silently, even though I knew it wasn't a dream and that I would never see my old Clan again. I could hear murmurs rippling through the cats assembled outside of the den as Nightfrost reappeared. He didn't even say anything as he painfully grabbed my scruff and yanked me up into the air. I let out a startled gasp but I did not fight him, what was the point of fighting a fight I couldn't win?

I was shoved out of the den, landing roughly on the ground. Nightfrost close behind me, his hard eyes looking at every assembled cat. I swallowed nervously; all of them looked fierce and deadly. Was I doomed to serve with these cats, causing chaos in the Clans?

"This kit has been chosen to fight alongside us as a guard!" Nightfrost began, the gathered cats falling silent. "And, as a new member of ShadeClan, I appoint him a name… from this day forth until he becomes an apprentice, this kit shall be known as Spiritkit!"

Chapter 2 (Wispkit)

I stared up at the sky, my large blue eyes glowing thoughtfully. For some reason, I felt a strong sorrow, I wonder why. I slowly glanced over at my two bigger siblings who were tumbling around letting out playful yowls. Was it because they didn't care about me? No, I was used to that now, but why did I feel this?

"You feel it too?" my mother, Russetstream, whispered softly to me. "That is the feeling we get when a young kit has been taken away from his or her Clan and forced to bare a new name."

"I don't like it," I complained. "It's sad and painful."

"That's why we do everything in our power to protect the innocent," Russetstream meowed.

"How come Blazekit and Lifekit don't feel it?" I asked, they were as cheerful as always. "Why only me?"

Russetstream remained silent; she wore the same curiosity that I was feeling. Was this not normal, why was I so different? I so badly wanted to ask, but I could find the words to. No, I was never one to speak out unless it was necessary. Russetstream was always telling me that I should act more like a kit my age, to have fun and enjoy myself, even though I just couldn't. I was too small, that's what Lifekit always told me. I was too weak, that's what Blazekit told me. I was just a nuisance that needed to just disappear. "Why don't you go play with Blazekit and Lifekit, I need to go talk with Yellowlily about something."

I blinked as Russetstream quietly walked away, my eyes narrowing slightly. So there was something wrong with me, I glanced over at my siblings, she never listened to me. No matter how often I told her that none of the other kits wanted to play with me, she never listened. I glanced over at the medicine cat den, my paws itching to get closer so that I could hear what they were talking about. Slowly and cautiously, I crept closer to the den with each step my interest grew. I paused and crouched down; I was

close enough so that if I strained my ears, I could just make out what the two she-cats were talking about.

"Yellowlily, this isn't normal!" I could hear my mother meow anxiously to the medicine cat. "Normally a cat can't feel this pain until they receive their warrior name and it only happens to a handful of cats. How could Wispkit get it when she hasn't even turned a moon yet?"

"Wispkit… she's special," was Yellowlily's hesitant respond.

Special? That was the first time someone referred to me a special, and not as a puny weakling who was always in the way.

"Does that mean she'll have to go through even more trouble?" Russetstream asked, her voice growing slightly louder. "She's always excluded, always by herself! I just want her to be a normal kit without any more worries!"

"It's a gift given by StarClan, a gift only a special few or privileged with!" Yellowlily answered sharply. "She's going to be a gifted cat, a prodigy!"

Russetstream's response was too soft for me to hear, forcing me to wriggle forward slightly. I was just starting to tone in on the conversation when two sandy gray paws stopped in front of me. "And what are you doing?"

I nervously glanced up to see Sandpaw; he had been made an apprentice around a couple of sun highs after I was born. I really don't know him very well, but the time he was around when we were kits had been torture. "N-nothing!" I stammered and slowly backed away.

"Oh really?" Sandpaw questioned and he shoved his muzzle into my face, his narrowed green eyes focusing on mine. "You're lying."

"I-I-I'm sorry!" I stammered and continued to back up. "I-I was just curious to see what was wrong with me."

"Huh?"

“I-I won’t do it again!” I promised hastily before beating a quick retreat into the safety of the nursery. Sandpaw scared me, not only was he always rude towards me he always jerked me around. “If this is such a good Clan, why am I being treated like this?”

“Oh, Wispkit, I didn’t know you were in here too!” a soft greeting came from the entrance and in came a small white she-cat, her name was Petalkit and she was in a situation much like me. She was different too; her eyes were a pinkish-red, different from any other cats’ in this Clan. “Did something happen again?”

“It was Sandpaw…” I whispered and allowed Petalkit to sit down next to me.

“What did he do this time?” she asked her voice cold from the thought of her friend being harmed.

“He didn’t do anything… it’s just, just being around him, it scares me,” I mumbled.

Petalkit gently rubbed her tail soothingly along my back. “You’ll be okay.”

I nodded and allowed Petalkit to comfort me; she had been through things worse than this… I should be the one comforting her. I knew she had nightmares of that place every night, I could always hear her restless wriggling in the nest next to mine. But I could never think of what to say. “Say Petalkit, what was it like?”

“What was what like?” Petalkit asked playing ignorance.

“Um… was it… NightClan or something?” I asked.

I could feel Petalkit stiffen beside me and her soft, caring eyes grew dark. “Y-you don’t have to answer if you don’t want to!” I gasped. “It’s just that sharing… it helps.”

“Thanks for your concern, Wispkit,” Petalkit meowed. “It’s too painful to talk about right now…”

“Alright, I’ll wait for when you feel it’s okay to talk about it,” I promised, Petalkit along with many other kits had been rescued a few moons ago, from a thief Clan called NightClan.

Russetstream was always talking about how thief Clans were bad, how they took innocent kits from their Clans and raised them to do their bidding.

"Alright, you'll be the first one I'll tell!" Petalkit swore as she stood up. "Come on Wispkit, let's go outside and play."

I quickly leapt to my paws, a small smile spreading over my face. Petalkit was my best friend and I'll make sure to help her like she always helps me. "Let's go!"

Chapter 3 (Juniperkit)

I looked nervously at Softheart, our medicine cat, as she slathered a fresh batch of poultice on Firefur's, my father's, stomach wound. It had been three days since the attack, since Firefur had been severely wounded and my brother, Dashkit, had been taken. Sweetstar had done everything she could to find Dashkit's captors, but it was to no avail. By the time her rescue patrol had found the cats' scent trail, they were long gone. "Will he live?" I asked, my eyes round as I stared at his fresh wound.

"I don't know…" Softheart murmured. "Juniperkit, can you get me some Feverfew?"

"Feverfew? Doesn't that help with fevers?" I echoed, recalling the herb that I was given quite often to help me with my many illnesses.

I looked back at Firefur; he was shivering fiercely despite being on the fluffiest moss bed I had ever seen. His chest was raising and falling rapidly, faster than it usually did. "Is he sick?"

"You remember what feverfew looks like, right?" Softheart asked instead of answering my question.

"Um… it has white flowers, its leaves are really soft and it's sharp smelling," I meowed hesitantly while trying to recall what I knew about the herb.

"That's right, can you go me some," Softheart purred encouragingly.

"If it'll help father!" I agreed and quickly scurried towards where Softheart stored her herbs. The medicine cat den was well organized; it's positioned under the outcrop that sticks out over our camp, allowing for shelter from the rain. Well twined bramble branches circled around the clearing. The medicine cat's next was near the herb storage. The herbs were stored in a crevice in the outcrop. I stuck my head into the dark crevice; it was too dark to

see them so I had to go by scent. I cautiously stepped farther into the storage, sniffing before I could finally locate the feverfew. I reached out and gently rubbed it, the fuzzy leaves tickled my paw and I was taunted to giggle, I shook my head, now wasn't the time to be laughing.

I bent my head down and gently scooped the soft leaves up while slowly backing out of the storage. "I'fe gov vhem!" I mumbled past the mouthful of herbs as I turned around to face Softheart.

"Good job," Softheart praised warmly. I placed the herbs down beside the medicine cat and watched in silence as she prompted Firefur to eat them. "Come on Firefur, they'll make you feel better."

Firefur stared hazily at the herbs beside his muzzle before turning his head away. "Papa, please!" I begged. "They really do make you feel better!"

Firefur slowly backed at me and smiled softly before closing his eyes again.

"Why won't he eat them?" I cried.

Softheart looked sorrowfully at Firefur before whispering something softly.

"What?" I asked, annoyed that I had missed it. "Speak louder."

Softheart looked at me, her eyes clouded with a darkness I had never seen before. She reluctantly repeats what she had said. "He's dying."

I stared, confused, at Softheart. I looked at her solemn golden eyes. "No…" I gasped and I backed away from the medicine cat. "How could he be dying, isn't it your job to save him? I don't want to lose Papa…"

"Juniperkit, I'm sorry," Softheart mumbled. "A medicine cat is gifted with the ability to heal, but when it is a cat's time, all we

can do is send them peacefully to StarClan."

I shook my head, refusing to listen to her. "Papa can't die!" I protested before whipping around and stalking out of the medicine cat den, my tail lowering in defeat. I knew she was right, Firefur was dying, but I couldn't believe her. Dashkit had been taken already, I didn't want Firefur to get taken from me either.

I numbly padded back to the nursery; I stared reluctantly at the nursery entrance. It wasn't right without Dashkit with me. I forced myself to enter the enclosed den, my grieving mother, Rosethorn, looked up as I entered the den. "How's Firefur?"

"Papa's… papa's dying…" I chocked out hoarsely.

Rosethorn's eyes widened and she quickly burst out of her nest. She nosed past the ferns blocking the light from the den and rushed outside. I watched her leave and crouched down in the nest, my eyes wondering to the spot Dashkit would always sleep. "Papa…" I whispered and curled my tail over my muzzle. "I don't want you to leave me too."

Chapter 4 (Jadekit)

“Yellowkit, what’s going on?” I asked as I crouched beside my blind sister, her nose was high in the air and her ears twitched back in forth as her sharper senses caught things I couldn’t yet hear or scent.

“A new scent…” Yellowkit whispered and I dragged her farther under our makeshift den, my heart beat starting to pick up. It had been two nights since our mother had mysteriously got up and disappeared, she had told us to stay right here and wait for her return. “They’re cats, but mother’s not with them.”

I stared suspiciously past one of the wide golden bush leaves, my eyes searching for any signs of approaching cats. I could see distant movement and glimpsed the pelt of a ginger cat. I pulled back under the bush and curled my tail protectively around Yellowkit.

“She’s getting closer…” Yellowkit murmured. “It seems like she’s searching for something…”

“Think she’s looking for us?” I asked maybe mother had sent her out to find us.

“Hello Jadekit, Yellowkit!” the she-cat called. “I was informed that you two are here, so can you please come out?”

“She’s not lying,” Yellowkit whispered, her blind eyes looking straight where the she-cat was standing. “We can trust her.”

“We’re here,” Jadekit growled gruffly, refusing to leave the comfort of the bushes.

“Oh, I’m glad you two aren’t hurt!” the she-cat purred and she hurried over to us. “You’re mother told me I could find you here.”

Yellowkit slipped past me, ignoring my protests and padded right up to the she-cat. “You’re not lying,” Yellowkit meowed in

that emotionless way of hers. “But you’re hiding something.”

“What are you hiding?” I growled as I padded up to stand in front of the she-cat while pulling Yellowkit behind me.

“You’re being taken to Talia’s Adoption Center, we won’t harm you and we’ll look out for you until someone adopts you,” the she-cat explained.

“Wait… adopt?” Jadekit gasped. “You mean like… being taken into a different family and… what about mother?”

“You’re mother left you in our care, for unknown reasons,” the she-cat explained.

“She means it…” Yellowkit whispered. “Mother left us.”

A low hiss escaped from me and I quickly back tracked to the bush, my teeth grabbing hold of Yellowkit’s scruff and dragged her back with me. I nudged her under the bush and followed, pushing us back to the very base of the bush. “You aren’t going to take us with you!” I snarled. “We’ll wait for mother to return!”

“Brother, she means best for us,” Yellowkit mumbled. “Besides I’m hungry and cold so it would be better to go with her.”

“It’s hard to say no to you…” I sighed reluctantly. “Fine we’ll come with you, just tell us your name first!”

“Alright,” the she-cat purred. “I’m Cindertree, the adviser of Talia’s Adoption Center.”

“The adoption center has an adviser?” I meowed dubiously as I crawled out from under the bush, ignoring the twigs that were wrapped around my fur. The tip of my tail was on Yellowkit’s shoulder, guiding her out from underneath.

“That adoption center has practically its own Clan,” Cindertree explained as she calmly plucked the twigs out from my pelt. “It has a leader, adviser, warriors, apprentices, queens and their own kits. We also have plenty of kits waiting for adoption, but once they turn six moons they won’t be up for adoption and will train as an apprentice for the adoption center.”

“Sounds complicated…” I mumbled darkly, I was less than enthusiastic to enter my new life in the adoption center.

“Don’t worry, since you’re a kit, you don’t have to worry about these things yet,” Cindertree explained cheerfully. “How old are you two?”

“None of your business,” I growled while Yellowkit replied softly. “Two moons.”

“Two moons, eh? You have plenty of time for an adopter to take you in, although with Jadekit’s sharp tongue I have some doubts…”

“How do you know my name!” I snarled. “I haven’t told you it yet!”

“Your mother told me,” Cindertree meowed. “Ah, here we are!”

Cindertree had stopped in front of a large clearing surrounded by trees tightly together. Barriers of twigs and thorns rested in between the trees, except for one small entrance the size of around a cat. “Here we are, home sweet home!”

“This will never be home…” I growled while stalking grumpily past Cindertree and into the clearing.

“Jadekit doesn’t like change,” Yellowkit meowed to Cindertree, I was just barely able to hear her. “He’ll probably be less grouchy once he gets used to this, maybe.”

Cinderheart chortled slightly before catching up to me, Yellowkit padded over to me and when I laid my tail on her shoulder she shook her head. “I want to show them that I’m strong…”

“You never cared for this stuff before,” I mumbled in weak protest while removing my tail from her. “Is it because they’re new cats?”

Yellowkit nodded slightly and I fell back next to her to gently nudge her. “Don’t worry, if they decide to pick on you, I’ll kick their furry behinds into the next moon!”

“Thanks,” Yellowkit giggled and allowed me to lead her

into the camp.

“Hey, that’s what over protective big brothers are for!” I declared. “We’re here to protect our younger siblings!”

“Hey, look newcomers!” we heard a loud yowl and a maple brown she-cat raced forward, her large amber eyes looking directly at us. I glared at her while Yellowkit cautiously approached.

“Um… h-hello,” Yellowkit greeted nervously. “I’m Yellowkit.”

“Yah, yah, but who is he?” the she-cat asked, completely ignoring Yellowkit, her eyes focused totally on me.

“He’s my brother,” Yellowkit mumbled and she scurried back to me.

I rubbed my tail comfortingly over her back before growling darkly at the she-cat. “You shouldn’t ignore someone greeting you, or have they not taught you courtesy? When someone introduces themselves to you, it is only natural for you to introduce yourself back.”

“I’m Maplekit, and it is a pleaaasure to meet you,” Maplekit purred.

“Well it’s not nice to meet you,” I huffed. “I’m Jadekit.”

“Jadekit, that’s a nice name,” Maplekit continued, practically oblivious towards Yellowkit.

A low growl formed in my throat, I did not like this kit. If every kit in this rotten adoption center was like that…

“Hey, I’m Firekit,” another kit, a ginger tom greeted. “Sorry about Maplekit’s er… attitude.”

“She’s a unique on,” I joked. “I’m Jadekit, and this is my sister, Yellowkit,” I then gently nudged Yellowkit forward.

“He-hello,” Yellowkit mumbled and she dipped her head in

greeting, she was shacking from nerves.

"Yellowkit, it's nice to meet you," Firekit meowed but when she lifted her head up and he noticed her cloudy blue-white eyes he took a step back. "Is she blind?"

"That's right, got a problem with that?" I growled while narrowing my eyes at the large tom.

"N-not at all," the tom stammered, the look in his large green eyes showed that he was clearly lying.

"What's with the cats around here?" I snarled. "So what if Yellowkit's blind? She's a very kind cat and if you care more about senses and appearances than you're losing a lot. Come on Yellowkit, let's not waste our time on these mouse-brains!"

I angrily trotted away from the other kits, Yellowkit followed me soon after, her tail drooping. "Don't worry Yellowkit, I'm sure there is someone nice in this place," I promised softly. "And if there isn't anyone, well we'll just leave and stake out a living on our own. Maybe even find mother again."

I was mainly focused on Yellowkit, trying to see how she felt. She was never too good with going to new places, and I was worried that all these cats scared her. I let out an oof as I bumped into something furry. "Hey watch-" I broke off when I noticed that I had crashed into a small golden she-cat. Her wide dark blue eyes stared up at me nervously. "I-I'm sorry," I mumbled and glanced away. "I wasn't looking where I was going…"

"It's okay," the golden kit laughed and she stood up. "I wasn't paying attention to anything around me."

"I'm Jadekit, I'll be staying here now and this is my sister, Yellowkit," I meowed and Yellowkit slowly peered from behind me.

"Hi, I'm Goldenkit," she meowed. "It's a pleasure to meet you both."

"Looks like someone knows how to hold a descent conversation," I mumbled to Yellowkit.

“I take it you already bumped into Firekit and Maplekit,” Goldenkit laughed after overhearing me. “Those two are generally nice; I don’t see what got into them.”

“It’s because of me…” Yellowkit mumbled and she padded out from behind me.

“Is it because you’re blind?” Goldenkit asked. “I don’t see anything wrong about that, though.”

“I also happened to snap at them,” I shrugged. “But they were asking for it.”

“Well, I hope we can be friends,” Goldenkit declared.

“Maybe,” I shrugged, who knows maybe I’ll stay just a little longer.

Chapter 5 (Spiritkit)

“No…” I whimpered and took a step back from the cat surrounding me. Panic starting to rise up through me, this couldn’t be happening. “I’m Dashkit, not Spiritkit!”

Nightfrost loomed over me, a dark sinister look glimmering in his eyes. He flicked a claw against my ear causing me to yelp and my warm blood to dribble lightly down my ear. “Next time you back talk me, *Spiritkit*, I’ll do much worse!”

I gulped and stumbled as I tried to scurry away. His large paw crushed down onto my tail and he dragged me back. “I have high expectations in you, kit, but if you dare disrespect those superior than you, you will be treated worse than just an outcast!”

By now I was trembling like a leaf in a wild wind, I just wanted this to be over. To finally wake up from this horrible nightmare, to find myself dozing next to my sister and our mother’s warm tail wrapped around us. The pressure from my tail was released and I hurried back inside the den, as fast as my wobbly legs would allow. I collapsed into my nest, and pulled myself into a tight ball. “I want to go home; I want to go back to Rosethorn and Juniperkit. I don’t want to stay in this place full of cats like these!” I whimpered.

“It’ll be okay,” Orangekit soothed, I had forgotten that she was there. “I’ll help you, okay?”

I raised my head and gave her a weak smile. Even with her reassuring promise, it wouldn’t be the same without my family. “Thanks…”

“Don’t mention it, we stolen kits have to look out for each other!” Orangekit shrugged and her furry orange tail lightly tapped my shoulder as she padded over to her grouchy brother who crouched in a dark corner. “Sharpkit, will you help me teach Spiritkit about ShadeClan?” she asked.

“Ha, no way!” Sharpkit sneered. “I wouldn’t teach that whiner even if I didn’t get anything to eat for seven sun rises!”

“Stingy,” Orangekit huffed and she stalked back to me.

“I’m kind of glad…” I mumbled. “Sharpkit gets under my fur.”

“Oh don’t mind him, his tongue is worse than his scratch,” Orangekit declared and she waved her paw nonchalantly at me. “Anyways, you need to start learning our Clans ways or else you’ll be fox meat in less than a heartbeat.”

“That’s reassuring…” I grumbled.

“Alright we the naming ritual so let’s see… oh yah we have a strange custom here, all stolen kits can’t mingle with non stolen kits and we’re only allowed out from sun high to sun set, or during meetings.”

“That’s stupid…” I growled, again a pain of home sickness rushed through me. I had been allowed out whenever I wanted, did whatever I wanted and hanged out with whoever I wanted.

“We also become learners at the age of four or five moons, don’t ask why, because even I don’t know,” Orangekit continued. “It might be because they want to mold us into doing their evil bedding without a string of guilt.”

I frowned; my Clan had made us wait until six moons before being made into an apprentice. And I knew they had a reason, the younger you are the weaker you are. It was mouse-brained to rush kits into growing up. “What else is there?” I asked, dreading the answer to the question.

“Guess I’ll go over ranks next,” Orangekit meowed. “The sooner you learn of these things, the better… so um, there’s the leader he or she leads the Clan. He’ll only have one life, but there are plenty of cats that could succeed him. Working right under the leader are his three advisers; second in command, third in command and fourth in command. When the leader dies the second

becomes leader, third becomes second and fourth become third. A new fourth will also be found soon after. Healers are almost as highly ranked as the commanders, only because they can heal the Clan, without the healers, our Clan would slowly die off. Even the leader will listen to the healers, and the healers can pick whoever they want to succeed them. So even if the cat they decide to train is a stolen kit, the leader can't say anything against that and go with it. The thieves and fighters are both equally ranked, but they will always obey the leader, commanders and healers. They get to boss us around, using their rank to make us do whatever they want. We have no say in the matter, and if we dare to fight back…"

"What would happen?" I prompted when Orangekit had fallen silent.

"I don't know, no one is mouse-brained enough to do that," Orangekit sighed before going on. "They are extremely arrogant, and they rather enjoy bossing us around."

"Sounds fun…" I huffed and shook my head angrily, only to cause a sharp pain to rush through my ripped ear and blood to splatter on the den floor. I flinched and gently touched it with a paw, when I pulled my paw away; it was covered in my blood.

"That doesn't look good…" Orangekit mumbled as she peered curiously at the wound. "I'll tell the guard you need Fawncall to look over that ear of yours."

"Why don't you just go and find the healer yourself?" I asked.

"We aren't allowed to leave the den except for a certain time of day," Orangekit explained. "We have guards who comply to our needs though, so we're okay."

"But to not be let outside…" I growled.

"It wasn't always like this," Sharpkit growled from that corner of his. "You can blame those pathetic 'savers' they caused the ones left behind more pain than before."

“What does that mean?” I asked, looking at Orangekit for help.

“I mean that… a Clan called LightClan attacked a few moons ago, we had just arrived when they attacked, took all of the kits, except for us, who were left for granted!” Sharpkit growled a tint of disgust in his cold voice. “So to keep anymore kits from being stolen, Nightfrost enforced the protection around us.”

“Anyways, I’ll go inform the guards that you need treatment,” Orangekit meowed and she padded over to the den exit. She stuck her head out and I could hear her say something to the guard outside. “He’ll get Fawncall,” Orangekit declared when she returned.

“So while we wait, can you continue explaining things?” I asked.

“Sure, sure,” Orangekit agreed. “Um let’s see… ah yes, a stolen kit usually gets the three lowest ranks: locator, hunter or guard. But there are rare occasions, if a stolen kit excels in their duty, their rank will go up. Albeit, the discrimination wouldn’t end there, you would still have to prove yourself. Usually if a guard proves him or herself, than he will be raised into the rank of fighter, locaters would become thieves and hunters would also become thieves.”

“So how do you come up a rank anyways?”

“Either you do an impossible mission; no one would know the details except for you, the leader and the commanders. Another way is if you manage to beat some unbeatable odd,” Orangekit explained. “It’s very difficult, and not many of the ones chosen will survive.”

“Sounds fun…” I sighed; the way this Clan worked was confusing. Why throw your Clan members into trouble like that? In fact, why keep rankings like that?

“Orangekit, you called for me?” a sweet voice came from outside of the den and a fragile looking pretty brown she-cat padded inside, along her back were white flecks.

I stared, mouth gaping, at the pretty she-cat that had entered the den.

“Close your mouth,” Sharpkit growled into my ear. “And you’re staring.”

I quickly closed my eyes and glanced back down at my paws.

“You must be Spiritkit,” the she-cat greeted. “I’m Fawncall, and I’m going to treat that wound of yours now.”

“R-right,” I stammered as Fawncall approached, now that she was closer I could get a faint whiff of milk, did she have kits? I wonder what they were like, would I be able to play with them?

“You’ll have a chunk of ear missing for the rest of your life, but besides that you’ll be fine,” the healer meowed once she finished rubbing a poultice over my wounded ear. “Try to be more careful next time, Nightfrost can be a very kind cat but he is easily angered. He has high hopes for you, just don’t go out of way. Oh and also Orangekit, can I talk with you for a minute?”

“Sure, Fawncall,” Orangekit meowed and she padded over to the healer who lead Orangekit out of the den. Orangekit glanced over her shoulder, looking at me for a brief second before hurrying after Fawncall.

Chapter 6 (Wispkit)

“Wispkit, I dare you to put some burrs into Sandpaw’s nest,” Petalkit meowed.

“What?” I gasped, startled at the sudden suggestion. Here we were, playing with a moss ball when Petalkit randomly suggested something like… this. “N-no way!”

“It’ll help you get over your fear of him, if you can’t conquer your fear, than you won’t be able to do anything for your Clan,” Petalkit declared.

“So I just need to put some burrs into his nest, right?” I mumbled, if I did it secretly, no one would know I had done it. “Wh-when should I do it?”

“When he’s out training,” Petalkit declared. “That will be the perfect time.”

“Will you come with me, I don’t think I can do it alone,” I muttered.

“Of course,” Petalkit purred. “I could never leave a friend in her time of need.”

I stared at Petalkit, before suddenly realizing something. “Where do we get the burrs?”

“Leave that to me,” Petalkit exclaimed. “Wait for me, over there,” she signaled to a small dark patch near the camp wall. “I’ll come back with plenty of burrs.”

“That’s reassuring,” I mumbled while slowly padding towards the area Petalkit had indicated. Why she was suddenly making me do this, I did not understand. Nor did I understand why I was so willing to do this, was it because I wanted to be braver or maybe because I wanted to be accepted by the others. I looked up at the cloudless sky, my mind wondering back to the deep sadness I had felt earlier.

“Alright, I’m back!” Petalkit purred as she trotted up to me, her pelt covered in burrs. “I hope I got enough.”

My whiskers twitched in amusement at her burr covered pelt, she almost looked like a skinny hedgehog.

“This will get Sandpaw reeeeaaaaal good!” she continued. “I heard that he’s out hunting now so this is going to be one of the most perfect opportunities we’ve got.”

“Wonder how this will end,” I mumbled softly.

“Huh, did you say something?”

“Nothing, let’s go already,” I swiftly trotted past Petalkit, might as well get this stunt over with and continue with life normally. I didn’t like doing these kinds of things, but Petalkit always enjoyed a good prank and if she liked them, I didn’t see why I shouldn’t. We crossed through the large, emptyish clearing without too many problems. Most of LightClan’s members were out at the time, doing patrols, hunting or training. There were only about five cats left to guard the camp, not counting the queens.

We arrived to the learner’s den; a large den shared by all of the learners in the clan, on its right was the warriors den and to its left was the rescuers den. The warriors den was a hollowed out log, the learners den was a large bush of some sorts and the rescuers den was a well woven clump of twigs. Careful to not make too much noise I pulled back the lichen in front of the log’s entrance to allow Petalkit to trot past.

My heart hammered with nerves, I didn’t know why I was so nervous, was it because I never did this before.

“Help me get these burrs off,” Petalkit commanded once she reached Sandpaw’s nest.

Without protest I slowly started pulling the burrs off of Petalkit and tucking them into Sandpaw’s nest. I was shaking by the time we finished; afraid someone would randomly appear and catch them in the middle of their prank. “Alright… I got all of them,” I let

out a heavy sigh and stepped back from Petalkit and the nest. “Happy?”

“Very much,” Petalkit purred. “Anyways, let’s hurry and go before he comes back!”

With no hesitation I bolted out of the den, glad to have finally finished this awful deed. I will never play a prank, it’s just too nerve-racking.

Chapter 7 (Juniperkit)

I stayed by Firefur's side, along with Rosethorn until his chest no longer rose, by then the rest of the Clan had heard the news. A strong melancholy lay thickly in the air as my mother slowly pulled Firefur's body out of the den, her eyes clouded with grief. Loyally, I stayed by her side while she drug his body to the center of the camp. Gently she lay Firefur down and took a step back, allowing the Clan to gather around and say their farewells.

"He had always been a pawful as an apprentice," Darkstorm, one of the Clan's elders, rasped as he limped up to his last apprentice. His eyes were a blind, hazy green and due to a jagged wound he would always have a limp in his front leg. "Never listening to what I told him, but he learned everything so smoothly, even when he was only half paying attention."

I closed my eyes and for a second, wished this was all a horrible dream. I longed for Dashkit to be back in front of me with father still breathing and mother back to her cheerful self. I let out a soft cough and quickly sat down to cover up my shacking paws, my vision grew hazy and the sounds of my Clan mates grew distant. Coughs continued to rake through my body, even when my vision and hearing returned to normal.

"Juniperkit are you okay?" Rosethorn asked softly, her sorrowful eyes looking at me in concern.

My reply was another bout of coughing which only strengthened mother's concern. I felt her teeth gently grip my scruff before she lifted me up, ignoring my coughing, wheezing and hacking. I wish I could have told her to stop, to not bring me back to the den father had died in but I had no breath between each session.

Rosethorn stopped outside of the medicine cat den and slowly placed me down in front of the vine covered den. "Softheart I'm coming in!" she called.

“Come in, come in,” Softheart replied and Rosethorn nudged me through the den entrance, the vine’s swishing as we entered. Softheart looked up from the herbs she was looking through, her gaze wondering to me. “Her illness has come back?”

“It’s because of the stress,” Rosethorn replied, and noticing my reluctance, impatiently shoved me forward almost making me collide with Softheart’s paws. She calmly steadied me with one of her soft white paws; they were almost the size of me.

“Sit down Juniperkit, let me examine you,” she commanded and I obeyed, the sooner she finished the sooner I could leave. I wriggled impatiently while she looked closely at my eyes, ears and mouth. “It’s the same illness as before… no herb I give you will cure you of this.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, tilting my head slightly in curiosity.

“Juniperkit… my herbs cannot heal you,” Softheart exclaimed after a couple of heartbeats of silence. “They can help but they will never heal you. You will always carry this heavy burden.”

“Does that mean… does that mean I can’t become a warrior?” I gasped, my eyes widening in horror.

“There is one other path than being a warrior, Juniperkit, if you wish to be useful to your Clan, you will have to become a medicine cat,” Softheart meowed.

“But I don’t want to be a medicine cat!” I protested. “I want to be like father and mother!”

“Juniperkit you aren’t strong enough to be a warrior!” Softheart snapped. “What if your illness strikes in the middle of a battle, what would you do then?”

“I’m going to die anyways, aren’t I?” I hissed. “Why can’t I be like father and fight for my Clan?”

“I will not let you throw away your life,” Softheart growled. “The only path Rosethorn and I see for you is the path of the

medicine cat, and whether you like it or not, when you are a made an apprentice you will be *my* apprentice!"

My ears grew hot with a furious anger while I stormed out, how they dare say I couldn't choose my own path! I can grow up however I like, and they can't do squat about it!

Chapter 8 (Jadekit)

“Jadekit, Yellowkit there you two are!” Goldenkit called from across the clearing, and she happily scampered over to us. It had been a day since we arrived, and to be honest I was too impressed with this place… not like I bothered to look around yet or anything.

“Hello Goldenkit,” Yellowkit dipped her head in greeting, a smile on her face.

“What do you want?” I asked might as well just cut to the chase.

“Uh yes well… um would you like me to give you a tour…” Goldenkit asked while nervously shifting her paws. “Since you two are new an all…” her words grew ever softer with each word she muttered and by the time she stopped talking, I could barely hear her words.

“No thanks,” I snorted. “We’re fine on our own so just-”

“We’d love a tour,” Yellowkit abruptly interrupting me while giving me a sharp glare. “Right, Jadekit?”

“Yeah, a tour sounds so lovely,” I growled sarcastically through clenched teeth.

“Great, than follow me!” Goldenkit purred, ignoring me. “You’ll love this place once you get used to it.”

“Let’s hope we’re long gone before then,” I grumbled under my breath which earned me a shove from Yellowkit.

“Jadekit, you should be more kind,” she hissed. “Goldenkit was nice enough to give us a tour.”

“We don’t need her help!” I exclaimed and lowered my voice when Goldenkit gave me another scowl. “We’re fine on our own.

“Look I don’t know about you but I need to know where everything is to cope,” Goldenkit proclaimed. “Now just shut up unless you actually have something nice to say for once.”

“Whatever,” I grumbled, but said nothing more as I sullenly followed Goldenkit and Yellowkit.

“What’s up with Jadekit anyways?” I could barely hear Goldenkit’s soft whisper, but I did and my ears twitched crossly. Inching forward a bit, I silently listened in on their conversation. “He seems a bit I don’t know… agitated.”

“I think it’s the shock of mother leaving us here,” Yellowkit stated confidently. “Jadekit is usually much nicer than this.”

“I can understand that,” Goldenkit nodded knowingly and I caught a glow of sympathy in her dark blue eyes. I lashed my tail and had to resist the urge to bear my teeth, I didn’t want any cat’s sympathy. “I was angry and shocked when my family left me here as well.”

Growing fed up with listening to the two talking about me, I abruptly turned away and started towards the opposite direction. Dashing behind one of the den’s in the camp, I peered out to watch as Goldenkit and Yellowkit glanced around for me. Snorting I pulled back behind the den and faced the camp wall. I didn’t want to be here, I didn’t want others sympathy… I just wanted to be away from it all. With my small kit claws, I ripped into the surrounding brush around the camp.

It was slow work, no matter how fast I tried to go, and worries constantly ran through my head. What if they found me before I got away? Would Yellowkit be okay without me? I hesitated when that came to mind, Yellowkit needs me… Shaking my head I continued to rip away at the barrier, Yellowkit would have others to help her out after all. Goldenkit seemed like a decent cat, I’m sure she’d look after my sister.

I stifled an excited cheer when my paw broke through the barrier and I eagerly pushed away the brush to make a hole big enough for me to squeeze out of. Wriggling through the small exit I

made, I was greeted by the familiar sharp, musky scent of leaf-mold. The sparse leaves up above, which were bright orange and golden colors, ruffled lightly in the faint breeze. The birds hidden well in their branches sang their loud melancholy songs. Even though I had only been in that camp for less than a day, it felt like ages since I had been in the forest.

It was all gone, my regrets… my anger… my misery, all of it was gone. Shaking my pelt happily, I started farther into the woodland. Suddenly I stopped and I glanced back at the camp I was leaving. “Farewell Yellowkit,” I murmured softly and I hoped my little sister would find the happiness she deserved.

Chapter 9 (Jadekit)

I stumbled to a halt by a tangle of tree roots, my paws aching from traveling for the majority of the day. Glancing up at the sky, which was easy to see now that the leaves were slowly falling off the trees, I noticed that by now the sun was setting. Not wanting to risk traveling at night, I scrapped together a pile of leaves for bedding. I paused while pushing together some more leaves, I felt like someone was watching me. Glancing around, I tried to catch the scent of whatever it was but all I could smell was the pile of leaves beside me. Surveying the area one more time, I came to the conclusion that the sensation was just my being paranoid. Shrugging, I continued to push together the leaves until I had an okay nest. Prodding it with my paw, I made sure no branches were hiding in the leaves before curling up and willing sleep upon me.

I jerked awake, my heart pounding rapidly, as I glanced around my eyes wide with panic. Glancing around rapidly, fear shot through me when I couldn't locate my sister. Where was she? I blinked as recognition slowly came over me, that's right I left her back at the adoption center.

I forced my bristling fur flat as I stumbled out of my nest, my legs shaking from fear. That dream… it was already a distant memory about some sort of… animal maybe? Shaking my head to clear away the rest of the dream, I stared up at the sky and frowned as I was greeted by numerous stars. I wasn't tired but traveling right now would be risky, after all who knows what could be lurking about. Glancing back at my nest, I considered curling back into the leaf pile when a nearby bush started to rustle viciously.

Turning towards the bush, I eyed it suspiciously as I backed away from it. There was something in there, and from the scent that came off of it smelled of death and carnage. Swallowing fearfully, I watched as a pair of gleaming amber eyes flashed in the shadows of the bush. A low growl emanated from the monster as it slunk out of the bushes, its teeth bared in a snarl.

Taking in a deep breath I tried to stifle my fear and I let out a soft hiss, which didn't even seem to faze the beast as it charged forward. I let out a stifled wail as its sharp fangs enclosed around my muzzle, my claws digging uselessly into the ground as it pulled lifted me up. My warm blood dribbled rapidly from the deep wounds and my consciousness started to fade. I lashed out blindly in hopes to free myself as I struggled to twist out of its grasp, it was useless. Was this how it was going to end? I don't want to die… I don't… want to…

I was suddenly released, my limp body hitting the ground with a soft thump, as the monster howled angrily. Something leapt around the beast, planting itself firmly in front of it… was it trying to save me? I blinked, trying to focus, as my savior and the cruel creature fought.

I couldn't keep up as the protector and the monster fought, their strikes against each other too quick for me to follow. My vision started to blur again, I grew dimly aware of the puddle of blood starting to form from the heavily bleeding wound. I was fading and the last thing I saw was the monster lunging for my defender's neck.

Chapter 10 (Juniperkit)

Padding out of my warm, cozy den I peered up at the stars above. I was wide awake and unable to sleep, the dream I had haunting me. I had dreamt of my father… and of how he died. I shivered, not from the cold night wind that brushed against me but of the dark memory the past night.

Sitting down and wrapping my tail over my paws, I continued to watch the stars that twinkled above without a care in a world. What would it be like to be so high? You could see everything, but at the same time not worry about anything. A simple life the stars must have… I sighed and stared down at my paws. Instead I'm stuck here struggling through my daily life, wondering what my destiny is. Would my illness eventually take my life? Despite the gentle reassuring of my mother, I knew that with each passing moon it grew more difficult to breath.

A medicine cat… would becoming a medicine cat be the best way to protect those I loved? Softheart had told her that me wasn't strong enough to become a warrior, she was probably right but how can I just give up my dream? But is becoming a warrior truly my dream, or is it the thought of defending those I love. "I'm too young to think about this," I scolded myself, most kits my age would only be thinking about the next moss ball they'd catch. But unlike most kits my age, I'm barely capable of chasing after a moss ball without having a coughing fit.

"Juniperkit, what are you doing out of the nursery this late?" someone's soft meow, I easily recognized it as Softheart, asked. The calm medicine cat padded up to me, her eyes staring thoughtfully at me.

"I couldn't sleep," I mumbled while shuffling my paws. "I had a dream about my father…"

Softheart's yellow gaze filled with sorrow and after a moment of silence sat down next to me. "I'm sorry I couldn't save

him," she whispered. "As a medicine cat I wish I could save every warrior that enters my den but some are called to StarClan and there is nothing we can do then."

"Why do they have to die?" I snapped, frowning agitatedly. "It isn't fair!"

"Everything dies eventually," Softheart stated, "some earlier than others. But death doesn't necessary mean the end, for the dead will continue to live inside those dear to them."

A studied the medicine cat silently, still frowning. She smiled warmly down at me and continued. "It appears you are still too young to understand," she mused which earned a glare from me. "But let me tell you, sometimes a cat is destined to serve their Clan another way. While the most obvious choice is to fight valiantly and hunt for your Clan, as that is what warriors do, there is another way. A medicine cat fights just as hard for their Clan, but in a different way, we fight the illnesses and wounds that the warriors of the Clan are inflicted with. Juniperkit, which path do you think would be best for you?"

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I sighed, looking anxiously at the Narrow Ledge. Today was the day, and my stomach churned with nerves just thinking about it. I had turned six moons and, despite being excited to earn my apprentice name, I was so nervous my paws shook. During the four moons after the talk I had with Softheart, I had come to accept my destiny… I was now more than willing to learn to become a medicine cat for my Clan. I glanced around the camp, watching as the apprentices cleaned out the nursery or as warriors brought in the fresh kill they had managed to catch.

My attention drifted towards the elders, there was currently only Darkstorm and Opalflight living in the den and both were incredibly old and wise. The four latest kits, who had turned three moons recently, listened impatiently to one of the elder's tales. Hawkkit, his dark brown fur fluffing out in irritation suddenly stood up on his hind paws and playfully swatted at Opalflight's ear. That earned a low growl from the cranky elder and a smack on the head
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that left Hawkkit dazed. Rainkit, the only female of the litter, rolled her rain blue eyes while her brown tabby fur fluffed out in amusement. Silverkit, the only kit of the litter that took after his mother's pretty silver fur, suddenly leapt to his paws and dashed off. The other three quickly followed which earned an annoyed snort from Darkstorm.

"Juniperkit, Juniperkit!" Bramblekit, his pale tan stripes standing out against his dark brown fur, dashed up to me. His large, innocent blue eyes looking up at me. "Play with us!" he squaked and the others gathered around me, clamoring for me to play with them.

Before I could say anything though, Sweetstar let out a yowl as she leapt up onto the Narrow Ledge. The Clan meeting was beginning and I my fur ruffled slightly at the prospect of standing in front of my entire Clan. I took in a couple of deeps breaths, trying to soothe my rising panic, as the Clan eagerly gathered around the ledge.

"There's nothing to fear Juniperkit," my mother soothed as she padded up to me, her warm golden eyes calming me slightly.

"I' m just worried I'll mess up…" I admitted softly while shifting my paws.

"You'll do just fine," Rosethorn assured, her long ginger tail rubbing my back in a calming gesture.

"SilverClan, I call you together to make a kit into a paw!" Sweetstar declared, the chattering crowd grew silent as they stared expectantly at our ginger-and-white leader. "Juniperkit, come forth."

"Stay strong Juniperkit," Rosethorn whispered into my ear as I nervously stepped forward, my Clanmates parting to allow me to approach the Narrow Ledge.

Sweetstar stared calmly down at me as I appeared from the crowd, an slight encouraging smile on her face. "Juniperkit you have now reached the age of six moons and it is time for you to

become an apprentice. Juniperkit, from now on until the time in which you earn your name, you shall be known as Juniperpaw. Softheart, as our only medicine cat, it is time for you to obtain on apprentice. Do you believe Juniperpaw has what it takes to train as a medicine cat?"

Softheart, who had sat among the crowd, stepped forward. "Yes, Juniperpaw will train hard to become medicine cat."

"Than Softheart shall be mentor to Juniperpaw!" Sweetstar declared and Softheart stepped up to me, leaning down as gently bumped her nose against mine.

"Juniperpaw, Juniperpaw!" the Clan cheered happily and the crowded around me to congratulate me and wish me luck in my training.

"Alright Juniperpaw, I believe it is time to begin training," Softheart meowed once the crowd dispersed to continue with their duties. "Today will be spent familiarizing yourself with certain herbs. I believe you know quite a few already but there are many herbs that you will need to learn about."

"I hope I don't have to remember every single one right away," I mumbled, horrified at the thought.

"Of course not," Softheart purred. "It takes even the most skilled apprentice time to learn every name and usage of an herb. And I expect, whenever you can't remember one, for you to come to me and ask. It is part of learning to ask questions after all."

"Alright Softheart," I nodded and followed my new mentor into the medicine cat den… the den I'll be staying in from now on.

Chapter 11 (Spiritpaw)

Four moons passed since I was taken to this place, two after being named a ‘paw. I could vaguely remember how in… what was it, SilverClan? Yes SilverClan, I would normally have had to wait until I turned six moons. Well not here, in ShadeClan a stolen kit was made into a learner at the age of four moons. Every day since I had been named Spiritpaw I would have to wake at the crack of dawn, meet my teacher for the day and train till the sun was high above our heads. After that, I would be taken back to the camp and sit sentry duty with another guard. At dusk, I would be reassigned another cat and we would patrol the forest until moon rise. The only time I had a chance to eat was right after waking up, and that’s if I woke up early enough, and then before going to bed.

However, unlike most guard learners, I had the special privilege to train under Nightfrost himself. I’m not sure if I’d call that amazing, seeing as how it’s gotten me into plenty of trouble. All of the other Stolen have come to despise me for the special treatment I’ve been getting, really the only ones who care about me are Sharppaw and Orangepaw. Even the comfort of my past was slowly fading from my memory. My old name was long since forgotten, Spiritpaw was my only name now. The vague memories of my family were mainly just emotions or feelings; the warmth of my mother as I snuggled closer to her; the joy of playing with my father; the protective love towards my sickly little sister. These feelings were some of the few I had left of a better life, and I clung to them like a life line. But how long till my grasp loses strength and it finally slips away? I didn’t want to forget them, but over time wouldn’t that eventually happen? They’d be gone just like any other memory before my arrival to ShadeClan.

“Spiritpaw!” Nightfrost’s annoyed snarl jerked me from my thoughts and I let out a pained howl as his long, sharp claws raked across my muzzle. His cold, harsh gaze locking onto mine until I looked away. My heart was pounding loudly and my chest tightened in fear, Nightfrost was in a bad mood. Whenever he was

in a bad mood he needed a scapegoat, and I guess that was going to be me. “You are truly pathetic!” I winced and shut my eyes, expecting sharp pain to follow the harsh words. But it didn’t come, slowly peeling open my eyes, I stared nervously at Nightfrost. He was pacing angrily back and forth, his tail lashing in frustration. He suddenly stopped and turned towards me, his eyes suddenly narrowing. I knew that look, it was one he gave to someone when they had a mission. I mission which usually dangerous, a mission in which you expected to die. “Spiritpaw, do you want more in your life than being a measly guard your entire life?”

Hesitantly I nodded, anyone would want to be ranked higher. To be a guard was a low position among the Clan, lower than anything… Anyone would leap at the idea of being ranked higher. “Then listen closely young learner, I have a job for you,” those very words sent a shiver down my spine, I instantly regretted answering his question. But then again, even if I hadn’t nodded he would have known. Nightfrost was our leader, he knew everything about everyone. “There is a spy among ShadeClan, and I want you to track him down and kill him. If you manage to do this successfully, not only will you survive the ordeal but you’ll also being training to become a Fighter.”

I let out a startled gasp, my eyes widening. A fighter… only Clan-born cats could become a fighter. It was practically unheard of for a Stolen to become either a fighter or a stealer. “I…” I paused, I can’t be hasty. I have to chose this wisely, no matter how tempting it is, it’s better to live as a lowly ranked guard than to die. But if I take the chance, that would give me the possibility of being treated better. “I accept this mission.”

A smug, crooked smile spread across he knew I was going to say yes. A coldness washed through me as I instantly regretted saying those four words. But at the say time, a fierce thrill burned inside. There was a chance to escape this horrible life… a chance to find sturdy ground.

“I’m not entirely sure as to who the spy is, but I have a feeling he might be of a higher rank,” Nightfrost exclaimed. “I would suggest you keep an eye on Hollowclaw, Lightningstrike, Thundercloud, Lionfang and Hailfall.”

I stiffened at the mention of Hollowclaw and Lightningstrike, the two commanders were both ruthless and cruel cats. I often remembered the harsh abuse they had dealt me as a kit and I often watched as they practically tortured the current stolen kits. Out of all the names listed, they were the ones who stood out the most. But no matter how queasy and how much I distrusted the two, I knew they were deadly loyal to ShadeClan and Nightfrost. While I hated to say it but Thundercloud and Hailfall were more likely. The two cats had shown me kindness despite the harshness the rest of the Clan-Born showed me. Out of all the cats, they were the most suspicious. “I’ll keep an eye on those five,” I exclaimed dryly. “I will not fail you, Nightfrost.”

“Good, now return to camp,” Nightfrost commanded and I dipped my head while slipping away obediently. With one last glanced over my shoulder, I slipped into the forest surrounding us.

To think that there would be a spy among us… I recalled when Sharppaw had spoken about kit savers. Did that mean there was a kit saver hidden among us? If so, did I have any reason to find him? Most likely the kit saver would bring his Clan and save the other kits, but as I thought of this a cruel greed slowly swarmed through me. No I wanted to become higher, I was sick of the harsh treatment I was dealt. The other Stolen will have to deal with it, but not me! I’ll become a fighter, and worry about it no more. My hurried steps started to slow down as I neared the edge of the trees, the ground around me growing rockier. A tall mountain loomed over head, its top invisible among the clouds.

I soon spotted the fortress of rocks that my Clan called home. To an outside, it would look like only a pile of stones… but it wasn’t. Slipping through one of the narrow cracks that appeared every now and again, I entered the camp. It was a large camp, with a clearing large enough to hold the many members of ShadeClan. Makeshift dens made out of woven twigs were propped against the stone walls and the fresh kill was safely stored in a hollow stump. The kit den, where all the stolen kits were kept, was a cave carved long ago into the side of the mountain. Its narrow opening was blocked by a wall of moss, and always had two guards positioned in front of the entrance. Right now, Treeleaf, a brown-and-cream she-

cat who had been recently given her warrior name, and Sharppaw were assigned. A faint frown had formed on Sharppaw's face, he hated having to stay still for so long. I waved a greeting towards my friend which earned me a full scowl from him. I stifled a snort as I trotted past, somehow Nightfrost had arrived to the camp before me. Which caused me to twitch my ears in confusion. How'd that happen? Well it didn't matter, and from the sounds of it I guess I wouldn't have to worry about guard duty.

Nightfrost was letting Brownclaw, the other guard, know about how I currently had a mission to fulfill and had no time to keep guard. The brown tabby dipped his head in acceptance in return, but eyed me curiously as if trying to figure out what was so important. I just shrugged, if Nightfrost hadn't told him anything there was no way I was going to.

Hollynight, a black she-cat who had recently been given her warrior name and became a thief, eyed me wearily. She had overheard Nightfrost talking with Brownclaw and she was probably wondering why someone more capable couldn't take this one. And by someone more capable, I meant her. I narrowed my eyes back at her and held her gaze until the fierce she-cat let out a hiss and stalked off.

"Spiritpaw, Spiritpaw!" Venomkit, a large and muscular brown kit with gray stripes and purple eyes, called as he ran up to me. His siblings Duskkit, a dark brown tabby, and Mintkit, a silver tabby with frosty-green eyes, joined me. They were the litter of Oceanbreeze and, due to being born to a Stolen queen, they would be treated just like Stolen as well. "I heard you have a mission! Can we help out?"

"Yeah, can we?" Duskkit asked, her large green eyes gleaming hopefully. "Pleeeeaaaaasseee!"

"Sorry you three, but only I'm allowed to do this," I exclaimed which earned me three pouting faces.

"But Spiritpaw, we want to help," Mintkit mumbled.

"I know, you'll really help me out if you help Sharppaw with guard duty," I exclaimed which instantly perked the three kits

up. Before I could say anything more, they raced over to Sharppaw. He flinched back, hating kits almost as much as guard duty, and shot me a venomous glare. I laughed as they leapt onto him, knocking him down onto the ground. Trying to contain my laughter, I headed over to where Fawncall sat. As our Healer, she was the only Clan-born cat who seemed to be willing to talk to a Stolen. Not only that, but she kept in contact with practically every cat in the Clan so if there was a spy, she was most likely to know.

"Hello Spiritpaw," she greeted and she slowly sat up, her two kits stopped tumbling about and shot me hostile glares.

"Go away Stolen!" Wolfkit spat, the black and white tom fluffed up his soft kit fur while his blue eyes grew ice cold. I flinched at the gaze, it reminded me so much like his father…

"Woflkit, Slatekit why don't you go and play with Flashkit and Spiderkit?" Fawncall suggested while gently nudging her two kits towards the other Clan-Born litter. They glared at me one more time before dashing over to play with the others. "What can I do for you, Spiritpaw?"

"I need to know more about the cats in this Clan," I admitted.

"Oh, so you're the one Nightfrost assigned that mission!" Fawncall gasped. "But your only a 'paw, much too young to do this mission."

"This is a chance to raise my rank," I explained. "I'll do anything to raise it, and if I die well at least I don't have to suffer in this Clan anymore."

"Well it's already too late to tell you to back away from this," Fawncall sighed while pulling her tail over her paws. "I'll tell you anything you need."

"Thanks Fawncall," I smiled gratefully at her while sitting down. "Nightfrost suspects Hollowclaw, Lightningstrike, Lionfang and Hailfall. Can you tell me a bit about their pasts, like why Nightfrost would suspect them?"

“All four of these cats came from different Clans,” Fawncall informed. “Hollowclaw had been stolen from a far away Clan and, like you hope to do, managed to raise his rank. He became a skilled and valuable stealer before taking on one of the commanding ranks. Lightningstrike had arrived to the Clan alongside Lionfang, the two after managing to gain Nightfrost’s trust, were fully welcomed into the Clan. Hailfall is the latest outsider to arrive to this Clan, he came heavily wounded and despite what Nightfrost wanted, I healed him. Over time, Hailfall was accepted into the Clan.”

“Do you have any idea who the spy might be?” I asked.

“I hate to say this but I think it might be Hailfall…” Fawncall sighed. “His such a kind and caring cat, different from any other in this Clan.”

I nodded, Hailfall had always snuck extra food to me when I was just a kit. He’d always talk with the Stolen as if we were equals and was always happy to give us new advice. “Thank you Fawncall, if I need any more information I’ll be sure to come to you.”

“Be careful Spiritpaw, you’re treading on unsteady ground. One slip up and it might cause your death.”

“Don’t worry Fawncall, I’ll be careful,” I assured while standing up and starting to walk away. I could feel Fawncall’s gaze on me as I made my way to the exit. If I recalled correctly, Hailfall had left the camp to practice some of his battle moves… “Hey Sharppaw,” I greeted as my friend padded away from the kit cave, Brownclaw having replaced him for guard duty.

He just let out a humph while smoothing out his ruffled fur. “Next time a swarm of kits attacks you, I’m not going to help.”

“But you looked like you had so much fun,” I mused.

“Yeah I was thrilled,” he snorted while rolling his eyes. “Never had so much fun in my entire life,” he paused and suddenly grew serious. “Is it true that you took on a mission?”

“Yes,” I nodded. “I can tell you much right now, someone

might overhear…" glancing around, I added more softly. "Get Orangepaw and meet me in the forest later, that's when I'll tell you everything."

"Alright, sounds good," Sharppaw nodded and he turned away. "Be careful Spiritpaw, if you get yourself killed I won't forgive you."

"Hey, have some faith in me," I meowed. "I'm stronger than I look."

"I'm not worried about the mission, I'm worried about what Orangepaw will do once she learns of this," Sharppaw exclaimed over his shoulder while leaving.

I winced, Orangepaw would be none too happy to learn about this. I watched as Sharppaw joined her, most likely telling his sister just what was going on. She shot me a startled gaze and, dreading her reaction, I quickly slipped out of the camp. Taking in a deep breath, enjoying the forest smells, I started forward. It was time, to start my mission.

Chapter 12 (Jadepaw)

I sat, hunched and as far away from the others as I could manage. Today was a training session between all of the apprentices, even Yellowpaw had to come. Due to her blindness, Yellowpaw was a clumsy fighter however she made up for this with her immense knowledge of herbs. I don't know where she gets this knowledge, but it's almost like she was born knowing what herb to what. However she couldn't exactly use this knowledge in a fight and so her she was, having to learn how to defend herself. I felt a tad torn between relief of knowing my little sister could protect herself and grief at the thought of her needing me less.

Yellowpaw glanced over at me from where she sat, at the far side of the clearing. She had sat between Sorrelpaw, a reddish-brown she-cat, and Maplepaw. While I still held onto my strong loathing towards the maple brown she-cat, Yellowpaw had started to build up a friendship with her. Apparently, or at least according to Yellowpaw, she had changed over time. I sighed and glanced back at our current teachers, Loon and Owl. The two toms had recently arrived to the adoption center, four moons ago, and had been welcomed with open paws. Loon was rather skinny and his ragged black-and-white tabby pelt seemed to always be slightly dirty. He was an odd cat at best and I often caught him rambling to himself, but beside that Lark had proven himself to be a skilled hunter and a swift fighter.

Owl was practically the complete opposite of Loon, his glossy mottled brown pelt was sleek against his well-built frame. He was at least two times larger than Lark and he always kept a composed air about him. He was a great thinker, a fierce fighter and never seemed to fear anything.

"I wish they'd just shut up," Eclipsepaw grumbled, his eyes dropped with morning tiredness and his usually well kept black-and-yellow pelt stuck out from just waking up. He shot a glare over at his sister Sorrelpaw, who was chatting up a storm, but he soon

broke out into a yawn.

“Sorrelpaw, will you answer the question?” Owl snapped, startling Sorrelpaw into silence.

“The uh… question? Can you um… repeat it?” Sorrelpaw asked, her eyes wide.

“Haha, she wouldn’t know the answer Owl,” Loon laughed, his somewhat crazed yellow eyes narrowed as they locked onto Sorrelpaw. “Here, here I know-”

“Loon we agreed I’d ask the questions,” Owl snorted, causing Loon to grow quite. “Sorrelpaw let me repeat, what would you do if you saw a fox sneak into the camp?”

“I’d raise up an alarm before going to the nursery to make sure the kits were safe,” Sorrelpaw answered confidently.

“And if you have to fight a fox, what would you do?”

“Er…” Sorrelpaw shifted her paws while thinking it over.

“Exactly, today we will spend working on the basics of fox training. Foxes and badgers are great threats for adoption centers. The two species, when hungry, hope to get easy prey and young kits are a great example.”

I flinched as my thoughts wondered back to that night, the scar that ran down my face throbbing from the memory. “I need you five to split into groups, whoever is left shall be paired up with Loon.”

I watched as Eclipsepaw stood up and padded away, joining his sister Sorrelpaw. Standing up, I started towards Yellowpaw when Maplepaw came over to her. I froze as I watched Yellowpaw nod, had she just chosen to practice with Maplepaw. Disbelief rose through me, Yellowpaw and I always did things together. I took in a deep breath and closed my eyes, so I was alone now was I? Opening my eyes, I turned to face Owl who was looking at me thoughtfully.

At the moment, I couldn’t help but wish Goldenpaw hadn’t

been adopted. That she was still here and I could hear her words of encouragement. She had truly been my only friend since my arrival here. The only cat who, despite my withdrawing from any possible contact, had continued to persist in trying to gain my trust. She had been the only one who, as an outsider, opened up my barrier. But, as fate had it, she had been adopted three moons ago and had to leave me behind. Yellowpaw is the only one who knows me now and even then, she's slowly pushing me away.

"Come on Jadepaw, come on let's practice," Loon exclaimed and the tom started to leap around me like an excited kit. I swallowed a rising dread and forced myself to head over to a good spot to test out battle moves. I stopped and turned, frowning as Loon's yellow eyes suddenly seemed to take on a more thoughtful gaze than his usual cloudy one. It was gone almost as soon as it appeared and I couldn't help but think I imagined it.

"Jadepaw's miserable, why?" Loon suddenly asked, causing me to stiffen.

"I'm not miserable," I protested, a slight snarl starting to form in my voice. "What gives an insane cat like you the right to say that?"

"Loon sees loneliness in Jadepaw," he declared. "To be lonely is sad."

"What if I want to be alone?" I snorted, my eyes narrowing. "What if I like not having anyone to worry about?"

It looked like Loon was about to say more, and not wanting to listen to more of the nonsense he spouted, I rushed on. "This is a training session, not a talking one. If you want to talk, go find someone else to torture but leave me out of it!"

Loon studied me curiously before shrugging his small shoulders, and after that the training bought went as smoothly as it could with a cat like Loon as a training partner. I was almost relieved when Owl declared the session over and I quickly scampered away from Loon as fast as possible.

“Yellowpaw!” I called and trotted over to my sister who started to flatten her ruffled fur. She looked up and smiled warmly at me. “How was training?”

“Well it went as well as it could for a blind cat,” she shrugged. “How about yours.”

“I feel like I learned nothing,” I sighed. “Loon only made things confusing for me.”

“You should have asked me to train with you, I would have gladly done so,” Yellowpaw exclaimed, frowning a bit.

Before I could say anything Maplepaw padded over towards us, and I gave her a withering glare which caused her to pause a bit. “Jadepaw!” Yellowpaw snapped, instantly noticing her hesitation. “Stop that.”

“You know I don’t like her.” I growled loudly, and Maplepaw flinched.

“You should be nicer, after Firekit left Maplepaw’s became much nice,” Yellowpaw huffed and I rolled my eyes, as if I hadn’t heard that one before. “But if you don’t have anything nice to say, maybe you should just…” she trailed off, searching for a good word.

“I should just leave the both of you alone, is that what you want?” I asked bitterly, and Yellowpaw looked at me startled.

“No… no that’s not it,” Yellowpaw protested. “It’s just… you should just leave Maplepaw alone.”

“Well unlike you, I can’t forget the way she treated us!” I snapped. “For moons she treated us like crow food, like we were nothing but pathetic flea-bags! And, seeing as how you clearly prefer to spend time with your friend,” I spat out the word in disgust, how could Yellowpaw even consider Maplepaw a friend after tormenting us for so long? “I care for you Yellowpaw, you’re my dear little sister, but you’re always glued to Maplepaw’s side. If you want me to leave Maplepaw alone I might as well leave you alone too,” I felt guilt twist inside of me at the pained look Yellowpaw gave me, but my anger soon snuffed out the guilt and I

turned away.

"What's with him?" I heard Maplepaw whisper and I struggled to contain the strong urge to whip around and strike at her with my sharp claws. It was so taunting and I could almost imagine the look on her face. Instead I forced myself into a brisk pace, even though her expression would be worth any punishment it wouldn't be worth Yellowpaw's reaction.

I didn't hear Yellowpaw's reply as I sped out of the clearing. My feet pounded against the moist ground. New-leaf had recently arrived and I could see signs all around me. Flowers started to blossom and leafs were starting to bud on the trees. Memories of that night four moons ago suddenly sprang up, unwelcome, into my mind. I shook my head and forced myself to go faster, I just wanted to get away… to escape everything.

I skidded to a halt, gasping for breath, beside a large oak tree. I recognized the intricate roots almost instantly, it hadn't changed since those four moons. Padding towards the tree, I spotted where I had decided to place my nest and where I had been attacked. The signs of that awful night had since disappeared with the passing of time, but it was fresh in my mind.

I thought I was to die that night, but destiny wouldn't have it. But they had arrived in time, I had been saved by Owl and Loon that night. They had fought off the monster that attacked me, apparently it had been a fox, and they had been the ones to bring me back to the camp. After that night everything changed, Yellowpaw grew steadily more distant towards me so when Firekit and Goldenkit had been adopted, I shouldn't have been so surprised when she started to hang out with Maplepaw more often. I dug my claws deep into the soft soil, today was one of the few times I had ever snapped at Yellowpaw. But two moons of practically complete solitude, since she almost always spent time with Maplepaw and the others, I had reached a breaking point.

It felt good to let it out, but at the same time I regret ever opening my mouth. "Yellowpaw will hate me now," I sighed.

"You could always talk with her," I jumped, startled, when

Owl spoke behind me. The large tom looked at me sadly and I had to refrain from making a witty remark. I didn't need anyone's sympathy. "She's your sister, I'm sure she'll understand."

"Yellowpaw can hold a grudge… she still hasn't completely forgiven me for trying to leave four moons ago," I sighed. "Even if I said sorry, she'd probably not completely forgive me."

Owl said nothing, he just sat down next to me and we were soon joined by Loon he came to my other side. We sat there in complete silence, maybe brooding over our own problems, before Loon started to mumble under his breath.

"Loon's curious," he suddenly exclaimed and he turned towards me. "Why doesn't Jadepaw have any friends?"

Chapter 13 (Juniperpaw)

“Pay close attention Juniperpaw,” Softheart instructed as she gestured towards me to look at a plant. We had walked some ways until we reached a plant with large leaves and small bell-shaped flowers. Sniffing it curiously, I noted the tangy scent that came from it. “This is comfrey, the roots of this plant are a good way to treat wounds and broken bones. However you have to be careful when digging it up, for if you take too many of the roots the plant will die.”

“I see…” I murmured while repeating the information in my head, not wanting to forget it.

Softheart then started to dig up a couple of the roots and handed them to me, I brushed some of the dirt off before picking them up. “There is also some dock around here,” she explained while setting off again. I trotted after her, trying to remember the plants location. “Dock is great for soothing wounds, although it can sting a bit upon applying it. Ah here it is,” she stopped beside a clump of large leaved plants, the scent coming from it was sharp. Softheart nibbled some of the leaves from their stems and sat up. Glancing around, she spotted a fern and plucked off a small leaf. She placed the dock down and rolled the leaf around it. “Using a fern is a great way to carry herbs.”

I cut off my own leaf and placed the comfrey roots down while enclosing the leaf carefully around them. Softheart picked up her leaf and started forward when a loud howling froze her in her tracks. “Softheart, what was that?” I asked softly, my legs starting to quiver.

“I believe it was a dog,” Softheart whispered back, her gaze shifting suspiciously about.

“A-a dog,” I stammered remembering the tales the elders used to tell of dogs. “Aren’t they just nursery tales?”

“I’m afraid not,” Softheart sighed. “Juniperpaw, we must

get back to camp at once."

That was when it appeared… huge paws landed in front of me and spittle flew about as it let out a fierce bark. It gleaming black eyes locked onto me and I froze, my instincts told me to run but I my paws were fixed to the spot. "Juniperpaw, look out!" Softheart screeched and I felt her head slam into my shoulder as the dog lunged. She howled as its deadly teeth dug into her and she wriggled fiercely to try to escape its grasp. The dog, happy about its catch, tossed Softheart into the air. My mentor twisted about in the sky before the dog caught her and all the while all I could do was stare in horror.

"Let her go!" a fierce snarl came from behind me, shortly after a blur of orange, white and black rushed past. The cat leapt at the dog, digging her sharp claws into its soft throat forcing the dog to release my mentor.

"S-Softheart," I edged closer to her, staring intently at the still and bleeding white cat. "Softheart," I reached out and gently shook her.

"Juniperpaw are you okay?" our savior, who turned out to be the calico Patchpaw, asked. Her leafy green eyes were wide as she took in Softheart's battered body. "Is she still…?"

"She's still alive," I mumbled numbly, noticing the slight rise and fall of Softheart's chest.

I didn't notice as Graydapple padded towards us, the dappled gray tom shaking his head in grief. "Let's get her back to camp," he murmured softly to me and I slowly stood up. As I started to recover from the shock of the attack, I noticed the slight wheeze with each breath I took. By the time we reached the camp, I was struggling for each breath I managed to muster while my vision started to blur.

"What happened?" Jackalhowl, a newly made warrior asked as we entered the camp. His golden pelt bristled in horror and his large ears flattened against his head.

“A dog,” Graydapple answered darkly and I left the warrior to explain as I stumbled to the medicine cat den. Entering the herb stores I reached out and scooped up some coltsfoot leaves. I quickly chewed the leaves and swallowed the bitter juices before spitting out the leaf pulp. Taking in some deep, shaky gasps and I felt a wave of relief to find myself being able to breathe again. But the relief was shortly lost as worry for my mentor took over again.

“Why would a dog be here?” I heard Sweetstar growl as I padded out of the den, our leader was pacing anxiously beside the unconscious Softheart while her tail lashed in frustration. “A dog hasn’t been here in seasons!”

“Juniperpaw, will Softheart live?” Twilightberry asked.

I flinched and glanced away, unsure of how to answer. I didn’t know a thing about treating wounds, or illnesses, or anything on herbs. “I-I don’t know…”

“How could StarClan let this happen?” Willowtree howled and she wrapped her tail around her kits fearfully. “Have they abandoned us?”

“They haven’t abandoned us!” Sweetstar spat. “Our ancestors will never dispose of us.”

By now a crowd had gathered and worried murmurs filled the camp. “If they didn’t leave us, than how could they do this to Softheart?”

“Softheart isn’t dead,” Russetleaf exclaimed. “We’ll have to trust in Juniperpaw to save her.”

I winced, I had just became an apprentice today how could I do anything? Would StarClan guide me and tell me what to do? I swallowed down the rising doubt inside me while exclaiming softly. “I’ll try my best…”

Sweetstar nodded while gently grasping Softheart and pulling her into the medicine cat den. Taking a deep breath, I followed her all the while trying to figure out what to do. Even though Softheart had taught me the herbs I needed to treat wounds I had no idea how to apply them. “Stay strong Juniperpaw,”

Sweetstar murmured to me while slipping back out of the den.

I watched her leave and after a moment I collapsed beside Softheart. “What should I do?” I whispered, hoping that someone would give me an answer. “StarClan please tell me.”

I didn’t get a response and truthfully, I didn’t expect one. I had a deep feeling that this was the time for Softheart to pass on. I swallowed down my grief and stood up, wishing I could do something. I paced for a while before sighing and leaving the den, I needed fresh air.

“How’s it going?” Rosethorn asked softly and my mother pressed herself against me, her tail rubbing against my back soothingly. “Can you save her?”

“I can’t do it,” I whispered. “The only thing I can do now is watch Softheart suffer.”

Time passed quickly and nightfall struck faster than anticipated. During that entire time I couldn’t figure out a single thing. A StarClan cat didn’t contact me on a way to heal Softheart and her condition only continued to worsen. By now all I wanted to do was ease her suffering, but even that I couldn’t do. “I’m so useless,” I murmured while glancing away from Softheart’s limp body. Her breathing was ragged and she would often cry out, as if she was being tormented by something. The jagged bite wounds were now scabs but a sickly green coloring was starting to form and puss was starting to form around the wounds. “I’m sorry Softheart…” I murmured and laid down beside my dying mentor. My throat tightened in grief and I covered my face with my paws. “I’m sorry…”

I opened my eyes to find myself surrounded by darkness, was this a dream? I glanced around, I couldn’t even see my paws. ***Juniperpaw.*** *A soft echo caused me to jerk around and I noticed a bright shining light.* ***You’re not alone Juniperpaw, I’ll guide you every step of the way.*** *I frowned, this voice was… a deep dread rushed through me as realization struck.*

I leapt up, my heart pounding as the terrible recognition

hummed through me. I knew that voice… turning towards Softheart I pressed my ear against her chest. No breathing… no heartbeat… a sickly feeling settled inside of me. I was right… the one who spoke in my dream was Softheart.

Chapter 14 (Spiritpaw)

The forest was unusually quiet, and the air churned with a certain foreboding. It made the fur along my spine stand up and I got the strong urge to return to camp; but I needed to complete this mission. But the fact that not a single bird sang was rather disturbing, and each cautious step I took farther into the woods sent a wave of misgiving through me.

A branch cracked, the dead leaves on the ground stirred… someone was near. Crouching low to the ground, hoping to stay out of sight, I tentatively sniffed the air. It was Hailfall, and to be honest I'm not sure if I should be thrilled or nervous at this discovery. Anxiety stirred through me as I recalled that I not only had to ascertain Hailfall's treachery but I would also have to kill him afterwards. Could I possibly be capable of doing something like that? Not only was I a lowly guard, but I had never taken the life of another cat before. "I have to," I murmured softly to myself, it was the only way to the respect I demand. And if I died than at least I would be in a better place, wouldn't I? I still recalled the distant tales of StarClan from my family from SilverClan, tales that talked of a beautiful haven for deceased warriors. I would go there when I died, right? "Only the corrupt and evil go to…" I shivered, refusing to speak the name of the dreadful place.

Ever since coming here, I feared that maybe due to the life I was now living StarClan wouldn't deem me worthy. Would they send me to the Place of No Stars, I cringed at the name, due to my rank? "Now's not the time to worry about this," I growled to myself and forced the thoughts of my after life into the back of my head, I'll worry about it another day... if there is another day.

I need to get serious, I'm dealing with a seriously powerful cat and I can't go messing up. One mistake might just cost me my life after all. So, with my full attention of tracking Hailfall, I slipped silently through the brush. I made sure to always stay out of sight while still keeping an eye on the white tom, which was rather easy

due to how much his brightly colored pelt stood out.

I didn't pay too much attention as to where Hailfall was heading, so when the large tom stopped at the edge of the forest I was mildly surprised. For the most part, the members of ShadeClan preferred to stick to the shadows of the forest and hardly any ventured too far past the tree line.

"You sure took your time," someone greeted gruffly and a confident tom stalked forward. He was a silver tom with slightly darker stripes, his eyes were a piercing storm gray and he had an arrogant air about him that said he was used to getting what he wanted. "I was starting to wonder if you'd show."

"Sorry," Hailfall meowed as he sat down while wrapping his tail around his large paws, was this proof enough? The fact that Hailfall was so relaxed in the presence of this stranger should be enough to tell me he was a spy but then again this stranger could be a rogue friend from his past. "I wanted to make sure I wasn't being followed."

"Well at least your careful," the tom sighed while he licked his paw and brought it over his muzzle. "Now the younger generation on the other hand… they act like nothing in this world could possibly hurt them."

"We were like that when we were paws," Hailfall stated and his whiskers twitched at the memories. They sat there in silence for a couple of moments before the stranger let out a snort of impatience.

"Bah, enough reminiscing the past," he abruptly started to pace back and forth, his tail lashing eagerly. "Tell me, do you have any good information regarding ShadeClan?"

"Well I'm still working on getting into the inner circle," Hailfall sighed, his ears twitching in annoyance. "The leader, Nightfrost is too cautious, and since I'm an outsider… I've taken many precautions to get on his good side and now that one of the commander's is growing close to retiring, there's a chance I'll finally be accepted."

“That’s good,” the silver tom nodded in approval before going still. “Tell me, how many have been taken from their homes?”

“Five in total,” Hailfall meowed and his tail drooped in… was it sorrow? It was an emotion I didn’t see too much of, seeing as how many of the members of ShadeClan deemed the emotion as worthless and never really let it show outwardly. “They’re all so young, they don’t deserve the pain they’re being forced to go through.”

“Fox-hearted ShadeClan thieves,” the stranger snarled and his pelt bristled angrily. “I wish we could liberate the kits as soon as possible but we need to know more about the Clan’s future plans…”

“Tell me Shellfang, how is LightClan doing?”

LightClan… the name sounded familiar to me, where had I heard it before? I raked my mind for the name, trying to recall it when it dawned on me. That’s right when Sharppaw had been a kit, he always complained about how LightClan saved so many of the Stolen but ended up leaving him and Orangekit behind. “Who would have thought…” to think that Hailfall was part of the Clan that always got in Nightfrost’s way.

“Well done Spiritpaw,” the sudden voice that sounded softly in my ear made my pelt bristle and I whipped around to find myself face to face with Nightfrost. His cold, frozen gaze stared directly into mine which sent shivers through me. “I knew you’d discover this treachery soon. Now, do the second part of your mission.”

“Second… part…” I echoed that would be to kill the treator. I gulped turned back to Hailfall, who was listening intently as Shellfang talked about how the white warriors kits had been named ‘paws and were doing amazing in their training. He had a family, how could I even think about taking his life now? His kits and mate wouldn’t deserve the death of their beloved… I was so deep in thought I didn’t notice Nightfrost shifting behind me.

“Show me just how strong you are, Spiritpaw,” he murmured menacingly into my ear, and then his paws slammed into my back and I tumbled out of my hiding spot. I found myself sprawled across the ground, laying just inches from the two tom’s paws.

Chapter 15 (Wisppaw)

I lay, stretched out beside my three closest friends, as I started to nod off. My muscles were sore from my excruciating training with Sandpaw. Due to the fact that Shellfang was away, meeting with our spy Hailfall, as the oldest apprentice the sandy-gray tom took it upon himself to oversee our training. So, despite being a newly appointed 'paw, I was thrown into the midst of spy training. It was only thanks to Petalpaw that I managed to make it through the session, since she toned down the rough training bout as well as explained some of the basics to me. Without her, I don't think I would have been able to learn anything today.

"So how's training going?" Amberpaw asked as she stretched out beside me. My brown tabby friend had been saved from a vicious thief Clan and so she decided to become a rescuer so that she could follow her role models' paw steps.

"I don't know half the stuff we were going over," I sighed while lying my head down. "Since both of our spies are away, Sandpaw was our teacher today…"

"That must have been tough," Heatherpaw murmured in sympathy. Another kit rescued from a thief Clan, my wiry brown friend had decided that it was her destiny to track down any evil cat and so thus became a searcher's learner.

"It could have been worse," I shrugged. "Petalpaw really helped me out."

"I couldn't just let you flounder about," Petalpaw meowed her whisker's twitching. "But that Sandpaw he should have let you learn some basics before throwing you in a middle of something important."

I didn't respond as I silently watched the Clan around me, my two siblings returned from training with Emberpelt who was a ginger rescuer. An ice cold loneliness crept into me as I watched

Blazepaw and Lifepaw talking together but I quickly suppressed it. I had my friends, who were practically like sisters to me. They were soon joined by Sunpaw and Sweetpaw, both of whom were training hard to become warriors. Sunpaw started to talk on about something animatedly and soon the four of them were laughing loudly. The other two apprentices our age, Bluepaw, a blue she-cat, and Tigerpaw, an orange tom with black stripes, joined them to see what the commotion was about. Both cats had been rescued from the same Clan and were as close as any siblings would be.

"Wisppaw, play with us!" Shadowkit, a two moon old black tom with yellow paws, called and dashed over to us. He was the Goldenfleck and Solarflare, and seemed to have his mother's friendly personality while having his father's muscular build. I could already tell that once he got older, he would be a strong and proud cat.

Flightheart and Runningstorm's litter soon joined him, clambering for us to play. Moonkit, who was a dark gray she-cat with lighter stripes, leapt up onto Petalpaw's back while lightheartedly pulling at her ear. Duskkit, a dark gray she-cat with a yellow underbelly, soon joined her sister while pressing her paws against my white friend's head. Sparkkit was the only one who kept her composure. The bright yellow she-cat with darker spots was unusually calm for a kit and would often enjoy hearing stories instead of playing.

"Alright, alright we'll play," I purred while my whiskers twitched in amusement. "What do you want to play?"

The four kits started to clamber on about different games, each protesting the other's idea, when an earsplitting howl of fear startled the camp into silence. The scent of blood filled the air and everyone's attention turned towards the figure standing at the entrance. It was Shellfang and he was practically unrecognizable from the many cuts that covered his body. His usually glossy silver pelt was ruffled and blood stained, and he clearly had to fight to stay on his paws.

Hanging limply from his jaws was a white cat I had never seen before, his blue eyes were vacant and clouded over. The scent

of death came from the tom and I wrinkled my nose in disgust from the scent.

"Hailfall!" an anguished howl broke the camp's stunned silence and Palebird rushed forward. Slowly, Shellfang released the dead cat and Palebird collapsed beside him. The ginger she-cat quivered from distress as she prodded Hailfall's side. "Please no… Hailfall…"

Sunpaw and Sweetpaw soon joined her, pressing against their mother in support. "What happened?" she whispered as she pressed her nose against Hailfall's bloody flank.

"We… we meet like… usual," Shellfang exclaimed, taking in gulps of air as he struggled to stay standing. "Then a… a demon came, a… golden eyed… demon."

"What do you mean?" Palebird pressed but Shellfang's legs gave way and he collapse to the ground. A small puddle of blood starting to form around the wounded tom.

"Enough, we'll talk about this later," Lightstar meowed curtly as she padded up to the wounded cats along with Yellowlily. The pale golden she-cat stared with wide green eyes at the severally wounded Shellfang. She was young, only twenty six moons, and had never seen a case so bad. Yellowlily, without saying anything, gently grasped the heavily bleeding spy and dragged him away.

Lightstar watched her quietly before turning her sad gaze on Hailfall's family. "He was a brave spy," she murmured while resting her tail against Palebird's back. "The Clan will mourn the loss of Hailfall."

They didn't respond, just sat beside their fallen family member. "This is awful," Petalpaw murmured.

I nodded, and thinking over it, this could happen to me. As a spy I would be risking my very life for those innocent kits taken from their family. But I knew when I became a spy learner the risks I would eventually have to enter, risks that are worth it.

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Three days have passed since then, and not once had Shellfang awoken. Many of his wounds were healed, except for a couple of deep ones, and Yellowlily was saying it would only be a matter of time before he would awaken.

Padding past the medicine cat den, recently having finished cleaning out the nursery with Heatherpaw, I heard voices. Lightstar was there and I think I heard Shellfang, and curiosity getting the better of me, I slowly slunk closer.

"I'm glad you're feeling better," Lightstar meowed. "But enough with the pleasantries, we need to get down to business. Tell me Shellfang, what happenend?"

"Three days ago…" Shellfang trailed off while taking in a deep breath, it must be hard to talk about it. To witness the death of your friend and then almost die along with him. It sent shudders down my spine just thinking about it. "Three days ago, I meet with Hailfall. It started off normal, he talked about how he was close to getting into the inner circle of ShadeClan and then he asked about how his family was doing. We were close to finishing the conversation when a young ShadeClan 'paw appeared, he was probably only around six moons. He was a bright golden tom and he had golden eyes that blazed with his fierce spirit. Hailfall thought about roughing him up a bit, to make sure he didn't talk about this, but he must have hit him slightly too hard. Something inside him seemed to snap and he… it happened so quickly. He killed Hailfall and turned towards me…" Shellfang grew silent and I could easily imagine the usually proud spy trembling from the horrors he witnessed.

Lightstar was silent for a moment and then I heard her stand, it was time for me to go. Leaping to my paws, I quickly scampered to the other side of the camp and joined Petalpaw beside the learner's den. "What did you hear?" she asked softly.

I glanced around before whispering. "Shellfang talked about who killed Hailfall."
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“Really!?” Petalpaw gasped loudly and caught the curious eye of Sandpaw who was a couple of fox-lengths away. Lowering her voice, she continued. “Who killed him?”

“A golden cat with gold eyes,” I replied. “From what Shellfang guessed, the killer was around my age.”

“A six moon old cat killing a fully grown spy?” Petalpaw meowed in disbelief. “That’s not possible.”

“As Shellfang said before, the killer was a golden-eyed demon,” I growled sourly.

“Do you know what Lightstar will do about this?” Petalpaw wondered.

“I don’t know, she probably needs to think things over first before making a sound decision,” I shrugged.

“Hey, what are you talking about?” Sandpaw asked as he padded up to us. “You sounded rather surprised about whatever it is, Petalpaw.”

“It’s nothing,” I exclaimed quickly which earned me a steady gaze from Sandpaw, he didn’t believe me.

“Let all cats gather at the Twisted Roots for a Clan meeting,” Lightstar called as she leapt onto the large roots of a towering oak tree that stood at the edge of our camp. Glad to have been saved from the situation, I quickly scampered over towards the tree with Petalpaw and Sandpaw joining me. “Shellfang has awakened, and we now know the identity of Hailfall’s killer.”

Murmurs rippled through the assembled cats and when I glanced over at Sunpaw, his usually friendly blue eyes were cold and clearly showed his hunger to avenge his father. “While his name is unknown we know what he looks like. He is a young, probably around six moons, golden tom with golden eyes. Now I have thought over this for a while and I have decided what we should do about this cat-”

“Kill him!” someone’s yowl interrupted Lightstar and howls

of agreement rose through the Clan. “We must punish the golden-eyed demon!”

“Patience,” Lightstar snapped and her glare silenced the crowd. “I have decided that for now, we shall do nothing. Now before anyone protests let me tell you that most likely this cat belongs to ShadeClan, and to get to him we have to go through ShadeClan. We are not strong enough to take on ShadeClan yet, and we must wait but in time, we will avenge Hailfall’s death as well as release the kits who were cruelly taken from their home Clans.”

The assembled Clan members glanced at one another, unsure whether to agree on this or not. “We will train hard,” Solarburst declared. “And when the time comes, we will be strong enough to make ShadeClan wish they never killed our Clan mate!”

“Now due to Shellfang still recovering, the spy learners currently don’t have a teacher,” Lightstar meowed. “To make sure they are trained to the best of their abilities, I have decided that Solarburst who was a skilled spy will help you with your training.”

“The deputy will be teaching us!” Petalpaw murmured, her eyes gleaming in excitement. I nodded and my claws dug anxiously into the ground, what would it be like to train with the deputy?

“This meeting is dismissed,” Lightstar finished and she leapt down from the roots.

“Spy learners, the day is still young so we shall continue your training,” Solarburst declared and he soon leapt down from his spot on the roots. I shot Petalpaw a look, two training sessions in one day… Petalpaw just shrugged, and followed Solarburst.

“The Clan’s getting serious,” Sandpaw stated to no one in particular while joining Petalpaw.

Sighing I followed, time for more training.

Chapter 16 (Jadepaw)

I sat near the edge of the camp, watching my Clanmates silently as they went about doing their duties. I sighed, feeling an uneasy loneliness that I wished would just go away but instead it lay like a heavy rock in my gut.

"Catch me if you can!" Sagekit, a golden kit with brown stripes and green eyes, complained. She was the only daughter of Palestripe and Leafrustle while her brothers were Rowankit, a dark brown tom with reddish spots, and Kestrelkit, a golden-brown tabby tom.

The small kit dashed about the clearing as her two brothers bolted after her, in her mouth she clutched a small moss ball. She leapt away as Rowankit lunged at her, resulting in him face planting onto the ground. Prancing away, she let out a yelp as Kestrelkit suddenly grabbed her tail and yanked her back. The ball fell to the ground and her brother eagerly scooped it up.

My thoughts wondered back to the time when Yellowpaw and I were still with Mother, when we were a tightly knit family with no rifts between the three of us. Now Mother was gone and Yellowpaw was more distant than ever. Speaking of Yellowpaw, I watched as she returned from herb gathering with Maplepaw and Cloverpaw. Sensing my presence, my sister turned her blind gaze towards me before snorting and looking away.

"Still hasn't forgiven you?" Owl rumbled softly as he padded up to me.

"Not yet…" I mumbled while glancing away in an attempt to hide my pain. "I'm okay though since I know she'll get over it eventually."

"Let's go hunting," Owl exclaimed. "It's about time you did something."

“Fine,” I shrugged while standing up, my paws ached to go outside again and I was soon eagerly trotting towards the camp entrance which was a small tunnel, just barely the size of a cat, going through the brush surrounding the camp.

“Come on Loon,” Owl called and the strange tom scuttled over to us. “We’re going hunting.”

“Loon likes hunting!” he purred, his tail curling excitedly.

Owl didn’t respond as he disappeared into the tunnel, his tail rustling the surrounding leaves. With a final glance back at Yellowpaw, who had purposely sat with her back to me, I slipped out of the camp. Loon followed behind me, chattering away about how he hoped to catch a mouse or something like that.

“Loon you do remember that hunting requires you to I don’t know, shut up,” I snapped upon leaving the tunnel.

“Loon knows,” the black-and-white tom assured and for a blessed couple of heart beats he stayed quiet. It was nice to walk in complete silence, even though it lasted so shortly, for soon Loon was chattering away again. I stifled the rising growl in my throat and wished I could stuff moss in my ears to block him out.

Owl suddenly stopped and I practically bumped into him, the burly tom was stiff as he cautiously sniffed the air. His hackles rose and a snarl emitted from him. Loon walked up beside Owl, his large curious eyes looking around him. “What is it Owl, what is it?” he asked but Owl didn’t respond. Instead he crouched down behind a bush and gestured for us to do the same. Sharing a confused look with Loon, we dropped down beside him.

“We need to be very quiet,” Owl murmured while he stuck his tail into Loon’s mouth. “Don’t let them know were here.”

I obeyed but questions tumbled through my mind, the main one being who was Owl talking about. I was taunted to ask, to speak the question but the loud paw steps of someone approaching kept me silent. Pressing closer to the ground, my ears flattened and my eyes widened as I watched from my hiding place.

“Are you sure you heard someone?” a gruff voice asked and a set of silver paws, paws that seemed to be the biggest paws I’ve seen, stopped in front of our hiding spot.

“I’m fairly certain, sir,” another voice exclaimed.

“Do you think we’ve been discovered? Maybe we should head back…” another wondered but the silver pawed cat hissed back at them, silencing them.

“We’ll continue moving, a bunch of weak saps like them won’t be able to overpower us,” the silver pawed cat then briskly started forward and after a moment’s hesitation, a bunch of others followed. I felt the ground shake as they passed, so many cats… and was it possible that they were heading for the adoption center?

Owl, once he believed it would be safe, pulled his tail away from Loon’s mouth and sat up. “Jadepaw, we must warn the camp,” he meowed. “If we’re quick enough, we should have enough time to get the kits away before they arrive.”

“Owl who were they?” I asked, refusing to move until I got an answer.

“Thieves, that’s who they are,” Owl sighed. “They’re part of a notorious group known as BrambleClan, and their leader is Thornscar who was the silver tom from before.”

“We must warn everyone!” I quickly rushed to my paws. “We have to hurry, if we don’t…” I shivered at the thought, how many of the kits would be taken from us if we didn’t get there in time?

Without responding, Owl stood and started towards the camp’s location. With each step his pace grew faster before he disappeared into the surrounding brush. “Come on Loon,” I meowed and dashed after the mottled brown tom. I sped through the woods with urgency, we had to make it in time. We had to or so many would end up suffering. But would it make a difference? The unwanted question surfaced into my mind, after all these cats knew what they were doing. Even if we managed to warn everyone, even

if we were prepared, they could still easily overpower us, wouldn't they?

No I can't think like that… shaking my head I poured on more speed, and tore through the rest of the woods. I was panting heavily by the time I reached our well hidden camp but I didn't pause to catch my breath as I dove through the tunnel and entered the camp. Owl was already there talking to Talia with urgency.

Talia listened in horror, her eyes wide, as Owl delivered the message. Glancing at me, her eyes prodded me to tell her if this was true and not some sick joke Owl had made up. I held her gaze and she let out a shaky sigh. "Everyone!" she howled loudly, catching the attention of our camp members. Curious as to what was going they gathered around us, all watching Talia with interest. "We have been targeted by thieves…" shocked gasps rippled through the assembled crowd and they started to murmur fearfully. Talia plowed on, forcing her voice to be heard above the clamor. "We are being targeted by BrambleClan, but we must not falter! The safety of the kits must come first, so I have decided that they shall be taken out of the camp. Avia along with Yellowpaw and Maplepaw will take the kits to the underground caverns where they will be safe until this is over."

"What should the rest of us do? Is there something we can do before they come?" someone asked.

"All we can do is pretend we haven't been alerted, we must not raise alarm among the BrambleClan cats," Talia meowed. "They are a talented Clan that has been thriving for moons upon moons. They are practically legend among other rogues and other Clans while they are the idols of inspiring thief Clans. Most likely they will be weary and will know if we are alerted. If that's the case, they'd probably search for the kits before attacking us."

"We should hurry and get the kits out," Ava meowed and she started to round up the kits with Yellowpaw and Maplepaw's help. I watched as the slowly slipped out of the camp, using the dirt place tunnel as their exit. I felt a quick relief at knowing Yellowpaw wouldn't be here in the fight, she would be safely hidden with the others. The relief was shortly lived when a loud, bloodcurdling

battle cry rose into the silent forest. Everyone turned towards the camp entrance as cats started to slip through the tunnel. It started to widen as cats eagerly ripped at the foliage, and more poured into our camp.

So many… glancing over at my camp members I couldn't help but wonder. If we won, how many would end up dead from this?

Chapter 17 (Jadepaw)

I crouched low to the ground as I locked eyes on a brutal looking black tabby with battle scars covering his body. He tried to ignore the shake in my paws as I pounced, my claws lashing out for his muzzle. The tabby easily avoided my attack, ducking as I swiped overhead before he lunged and sank his teeth in my outstretched leg. I let out a howl as he slammed his large paw into my chest and forced me onto the ground.. A smug look gleamed in the tom's eyes as he pressed his foot harder onto my chest. I struggled to wriggle out from underneath, batting at his exposed underbelly but when I heard a loud snapping noise, it sounded a lot like a twig breaking, and then felt a sharp jolt rush through my chest, something was wrong. I took in a sharp intake, it hurt to breath... I went limp, my vision blurring as I struggled against my suffering.

A loud battle cry rose above the rest of the noise and the black tabby was forced off of me by… Loon? I stared, startled, at the ragged-furred brown tabby. His eyes were unusually clear and his body was tense, ready for anything. "Jadepaw are you okay?" I didn't respond, but I think the fact that I was breathing rather abnormally seemed to have tipped him off. "Tell me if this hurts," gently he touched my side, where my ribs were, and I winced at the intense agony that followed. "I think he managed to break your ribs," he observed.

"Never… would've… guessed," I gasped forcing the words through my tightly clenched teeth.

"Loon what happened?" Owl inquired as he dashed up to us, his usually tidy fur was ruffled, torn and bloody from the fight. A deep gash ran down his shoulder and his left ear had a ragged tear in it.

Loon recounted what had happened while I struggled to focus on staying conscious, it was difficult to breath and the pain was practically unbearable. Owl glanced over at me with a look of sympathy before saying something to Loon. The tom nodded and

the two of them took a position on either side of me. “We’ll keep you safe until the battle ends,” Loon murmured into my ear. “So don’t worry.”

Normally I would have replied with a sharp retort, that I didn’t need anyone’s protection, but my broken ribs kept me from saying anything. The pain was starting to dull down a bit, it still hurt to breath, but it wasn’t as bad. Risking a glance around, I watched the ensuing battles around me. Ginger and Palestripe were fighting side by side, struggling fiercely against a much larger tom. With a yowl, Sorrelpaw lunged at the tom to dig her teeth into his back leg. He easily shook the smaller cat off of him before being slammed to the ground by Ginger. He angrily slammed his paw into her muzzle, leaving a bloody trail where his claws struck.

Turning my gaze elsewhere, I saw their leader, Thornscar, slowly pacing around Cindertree who was panting heavily from exhaustion. Her left flank was bleeding heavily and one of her eyes was covered in blood. Cackling the large silver leader rushed Cindertree, who was incapable of reacting fast enough, and sliced his long claws across her neck. Blood gushed from the wound, splattering onto the ground and Thornscar. Cindertree took in a couple of ragged breaths, her eyes gleaming with a blazing hatred, before she rushed him. Her claws unsheathed, she aimed for his chest but he easily side-stepped the attack and as she soared past, he clamped down on her tail and dragged her to the ground. He was smiling with a crazed glee as he forced her onto her back and slashed his claws down her underbelly, leaving a gory trail where they touched.

Incapable of watching any longer, I forced myself to turn my head away. He had killed Cindertree… the one who had brought us to the adoption center and ultimately saved our lives, after all I had learned the hard way that kits couldn’t survive on their own for very long in the forest, and in return she had been killed so brutally. What are you thinking StarClan? Cindertree didn’t deserve to die, so why did you let her?

“Keep calm Jadepaw,” Owl murmured into my ear, he was stiff with the same fury I felt burning through me, and his eyes were narrowed as he glared at Thornclaw. The tom was gloating over

Cindertree's body, proud to have killed our center's advisor. "You can't let your feelings get the better of you in a fight."

"Owl, what should we do?" Loon wondered as Thornclaw, who had already grown bored of his murder, looked around for his next victim.

"Isn't it obvious?" Owl growled hoarsely, his whiskers flicked nervously as he started towards the insane leader. Loon stood beside me for a moment, before reluctantly following him. I gritted my teeth wishing that the pain couldn't prevent me from yelling at them to tell me what they were doing. Bracing myself to the oncoming pain, I forced myself to stand up and started after them. I wasn't able to go far, but at the very least I could now hear what seemed to be conversation between the three.

"Bloodclaw, this is an interesting turn of events," Thornclaw meowed, his gaze staring sharply at Owl. "If that's ever your name anymore. Do tell, what possibly possessed you to leave?"

What were they talking about? It seemed like Thornclaw knew Owl, why was that? "I did what I believed to be right," Owl explained finally. "And I no longer go by that name."

"Oh of course," Thornclaw snorted. "An infamous name like Bloodclaw would never allow you to lie low and hide like you've been doing for the past, season or so," suddenly the silver leader bared his teeth in an undisguisable revulsion. Loudly he yowled. "You betrayed us! Tell me, Bloodclaw or whatever your name is now, why did you do it!?"

Owl winced before shaking his head. "I have no reason to explain my thoughts to the likes of you."

Thornclaw stared loathingly at Owl before he started to laugh, loud wild laughter that clearly showed that he had lost it some. "I'll let you live for now Bloodclaw, but I assure you, the next time I show myself you'll regret ever betraying us," turning away the leader bolted off. "BrambleClan, retreat!"

Without hesitation, the many invaders turned and dashed after their leader, leaving behind our decimated camp and our

haggard adoption center members. Slowly Owl padded back to me, his eyes dark as he lost himself in his own thoughts. Loon bounced beside him, his eyes which had been so sharp earlier were now back to reflecting his muddled mind.

Owl helped support me as I stood on my shaky paws, my mind still realing from witnessing Cindetree's death and then hearing that conversation. Allowing me to lean against him, we padded past Cindertree's battered body and into the medicine cat den. I was laid down in a moss bed beside Talia, who had lost an eye in the fight, and Sorrelpaw who seemed to have fallen into a coma. Forest, Eclipsepaw and Cloverpaw sat beside the two, their eyes gleaming with worry at the prospect of losing their beloved family.

I won't let this pass, someday I'll track him down and make sure he would regret ever messing with our center. I dug my claws deep into the soft moss, my fur bristling for a brief moment, before I fell into a welcoming darkness that brought oblivion with it.

Chapter 18 (Spiritpaw)

I awoke to a throbbing agony that caught my breath in my throat, it hurt so bad… I forced myself to calm down and my breathing slowly returned to normal. My entire body ached, and there seemed to be something off with my left ear. My disoriented and sluggish mind struggled to compute what had happened and how I had obtained these wounds. Then my memories, ones that could come straight out of a nightmare, flooded into my mind. Nightforst had sent me out to confront Hailfall and the other tom… Hailfall tried to keep me quiet but roughing me up a bit… I had snapped. I lost control of myself, I was still aware of what was happening but I couldn't control myself… I killed him… I stifled the wail that threatened to explode out of me. I had taken a life… abruptly I forced my eyes open.

I was in the healers' den, which was filled with the scent of bitter herbs and of scared or sick cats. I hated the scent, there was just something about it that sent me on edge. Maybe it was because it reminded me of how frail life was, of how in an instant anyone of our life's could flicker out.

Despite my protesting body, I forced myself to sit up and get a better look around. No one was here, neither Fawncall or Orangepaw. Then I heard a faint scuffling and suddenly Orangepaw emerged from a well-hidden underground passage, clamped firmly in her mouth was a clump of dried leaves. She didn't notice me for a moment as she carefully chewed the herbs into a paste. When she finally did focus her attention on me, she froze and the gob of herbs in her mouth dropped to the ground. "You're awake!" she squealed happily, then she grew serious. "You should keep lying down though, you're wounds are still healing and I don't want you to reopen them."

"Whatever you say," I shrugged while laying back down on the moss bed beneath me.

"Oh Spiritpaw, you're awake," Fawncall greeted as she

casually padded into the den, behind her was Nightfrost. Noticing my staring at our leader, she quickly added. “He wanted to check up on you.”

“What fortunate timing,” he greeted and upon coming up to my side, prodded me sharply. “Now get up, we have no time to waste.”

“But he needs rest,” Orangepaw mumbled but the sharp glare Nightfrost gave her, sent into silence as she obediently clamped her mouth shut.

“Don’t worry Orangepaw, I’m fine,” it was clearly I lie as I struggled to my feet, gritting my teeth at the sharp pain that drove through me as I attempted to walk. Letting out an annoyed hiss, Orangepaw came to my side and willingly allowed me to lean against her.

Nightfrost frowned in disagreement, clearly wanting me to handle things on my own but then decided against it. A smart decision on his part since without Orangepaw’s assistance, I probably would have fell flat on the ground within my first couple of steps. Without another word, Nightforst slipped outside followed by Fawncall. “Once this stupid meeting is over, you’re going to get some more rest,” Orangepaw instructed me before we exited.

I didn’t respond for I was too focused on ignoring the pain that shot through my legs with every small step I took. I was panting by the time I had crossed the clearing and reached the rotting log that Nightfrost held meetings. Looking up, I saw Nightfrost leap up onto the log while letting out a loud, ear-splitting screech. The Clan slunk out from the shadows and slowly gathered around the log, Nightfrost’s three commanders took their positions in front of the log to keep an eye on the assembled cats. The Clan-Born cats gathered near the front, and there was an obvious divide between the Stolen who were forced to stay in the back. With Orangepaw’s assistance I managed to get a seat next to Fawncall, who sat with the Clan-Born.

Nightfrost was silent for a moment, his icy gaze sweeping over the assembled crowd before speaking. “I have three things to

announce," his cold voice rang clearly through the camp and any whispered conversations in the crowd abruptly quieted. "The first is that Spiritpaw will no longer be training as a guard, he will be given a new rank…" he paused, examining the cats' faces, before continuing. "Hence forth, Spiritpaw shall be trained as a Fighter under my guidance and no others!"

I was shaking as I felt all their gazes turn towards me, my heart beating loudly in my chest. Swallowing nervously I looked around, somehow finding the courage to meet the eyes of some of the startled crowd before glancing away. The calm only lasted for a few heart beats, it felt like a lifetime for me, before furious roars rose from the mass of cats. I understood there shock, not only was my rank moving up but the leader himself had decided to teach me.

"I demand silence!" Nightfrost's yowl rose above the clamor and his cold yet burning gaze glared down at the assembled. Eventually, the crowd subdued themselves and reluctantly began to listen. "Spiritpaw has gone through a trial in which I will soon explain, and as a reward for completing this trail he was given a rank up from guard."

"But this is unheard of!" someone cried from the crowd and murmurs of agreement rippled through the mass.

"Clearly it is not that uncommon," the brown advisor whose long claws always remained half-unsheathed, snorted. He was Hollowclaw, and the third in command. His gaze gleamed with unbridled frustration and his tail tip twitched in annoyance. "Have you all forgotten already?" he curled his lip when no one responded. "You only remember things for your own convenience… Spiritpaw isn't the only one who was Stolen and given a new rank."

"If you think back to it you'll remember a certain apprentice," Blazeshimmer broken in, the battle-scarred ginger tom sat rigidly and his green eyes gleamed with what could only be amusement. "This Stolen was made a guard but was given a trial, which he succeeded and then started to learn to be a thief. As time passed this young cat showed immense promise and was eventually chosen by the leader to become a commander. A commander with unrivaled skill and intelligence. Now tell me, do you distrust your

leader's judgment by teaching Spiritpaw the ways of a fighter?"

There was silence following the older cat's words. "Any who dare disagree on this subject any more can speak with me," Nightfrost declared. "But I would suggest you think over your words carefully, one slip of the tongue and I will deem you traitorous. You should know what it means to be disloyal, do you not? If not than let me enlighten you, Spiritpaw's trial was to discover one who was unfaithful to this Clan and to deliver the punishment worthy of his tertiary. Tell me, do any of you know where Hailfall is?" his gaze shifted through the crowd and not waiting for any to respond, he plowed on. "He had been caught betraying his Clan and Spiritpaw killed him. Any who go against me shall meet the same sentence, so I would suggest you live with my decisions or risk being condemned to death."

I gulped, the gleam in Nightfrost's eyes sent shivers down my spine and I felt myself shrinking back. It only lasted a few seconds before he gained the same cold composure he usually showed. "I have one last announcement, due to Hailfall giving information to a saving Clan, it is time that we move. Our Clan has stayed in this camp for many moons and it is time we leave or risk being attacked. We will leave in three days at dawn, I would suggest you prepare yourselves for a long journey."

Chapter 19 (Juniperpaw)

I padded slowly out of my den, my mind reflecting over the latest lesson I had in my dreams. The night after Softheart's death, ancient StarClan medicine cats had began to visit my dreams in order to teach me what I needed to know to successfully keep my Clan healthy. But despite their teaching me, I still had trouble recalling what I needed to know and every morning I found myself waking up barely remembering the latest session.

I ignored the warm good mornings my Clan mates directed at me as I stalked towards the camp's exit. If I had more knowledge I wouldn't have to worry about anyone else dying, if I had more knowledge I might have prevented Softheart dying. No I can't focus on that, her death is in the past and I must move on. I slipped out of the camp and allowed my paws to take me wherever they wanted as my thoughts wondered. I don't want to fail anyone else, I want the Clan to know that they can entrust their lives in my paws.

I halted when I felt my throat close up, my breathing turned to sharp rasps and my vision blurred. Not… now… I struggled to breathe as I slowly collapsed to the ground, my whole body shaking as I fought to inhale. It's worse than usual, the thought flashed through my mind as it slowly shut down. It's never this bad. Then I slipped into unconsciousness.

I stood on rippling white mist, all around me purple and green lights glowed faintly. Where was I? I tried to walk forward on but my limbs were stone heavy and would not budge. Why couldn't I move? That's when I noticed my heart wasn't beating, and I didn't have to breathe. Fear shot through me, was I dead? But if I was, why wasn't I in StarClan? "This is just a dream," I whispered, relieved that I could at least talk. "When I wake up, I'll be just fine."

The air in front of me started to shift and a blurry figure started to take shape. It continued to become more solid until I could distinguish the shape of a cat with glowing silver eyes. It examined me thoughtfully before smiling, revealing a row of sharp teeth. "Greetings, worm," I

flinched at the gravelly voice that emitted from the cat of mist. "Tell me, do you want to continue to live?"

I studied it thoughtfully, what did it mean? "Yes, wouldn't anyone?" Why would it ask something like that? Was I truly… no I'm not dead, this is just a dream… a nightmare due to my illness.

"Then I can give you life, but you must pay a price," it spoke. "We must make an equivalent trade."

"What must I give up?" I asked suspiciously.

"Nothing too major," the shadowy figure shrugged, brushing off my question as if it was no importance.

"And if I don't give up what you want?"

"You die."

I took in a shuddery breath before murmuring. "Very well."

I opened my eyes to find myself lying stiffly on the forest floor, it was cold and shadows danced through the trees. It was night… how had the time passed so quickly? My dream had felt like only a few heart-beats had passed, but instead it had lasted to moon-high. I scrambled to my feet, the Clan will be worried.

Taking a step, I suddenly froze as I noticed how still my heart was. Why wasn't it beating. Sitting back down, I pressed a paw against my chest, there was no gentle rhythm of a pounding heart. There was nothing… "What happened?" I whispered hoarsely, blinking my eyes a couple of times as everything sunk in. That nightmare wasn't just a dream… I was supposed to die, but I hadn't. Swallowing down the rising hysteria that threatened to explode out, I stood back on shaky legs.

That wasn't it though, my right ear failed to pick up any sounds. All I got was complete silence, even though my left could hear perfectly fine. The same was with my eyes, my right was capable of seeing the dark forest around me while my left saw only darkness. "Was that the trade?" I wondered to myself, trying to keep a calm, rational mind despite my increasing panic. "I just

traded over the sight of one of my eyes and the hearing of one of my ears," but was that really worth a life? No, I must have given something else up… but what?

Chapter 20 (Juniperpaw)

I can't tell the Clan, no matter how frightening this may be, I must shoulder this burden alone. If the Clan finds out I should've died, and ended up giving something up to live again, who knows how they'll react. My stomach churned nervously at the thought of what I might have handed over to that mysterious… thing. "Maybe some of my hearing and sight is enough for it," I murmured hopefully to myself, maybe it was feeling generous.

"It isn't enough," a voice whispered behind me and I practically leapt out of my fur in shock. Whirling around, my ruff started to bristle aggressively and I crouched in a defensive pose. There were three cats standing calmly in front of me, all staring at me with what I could only describe as pity. The center cat was a slim ginger-and-black tom that held himself with an almost arrogant confidence, his unusual crimson eyes caught my attention and I held his gaze in interest. Realizing I was staring, I forced my focus onto the next cat. This one blended in almost perfectly with the dark surroundings. All that was noticeable about the cat was its gleaming eyes which were a sharp, distinct blue with flecks of vivid red. The final cat was a slim silver tabby whose jade green eyes, which gleamed with a guarded slightly cynical glow, had a red ring circling around his pupil. "You've noticed our eyes, right?"

"Yes…" I paused then tentatively added. "Why do they have red in them?"

"It's his mark," the slim tabby growled, "showing that we're The Shadow's loyal underlings."

"So... am I like you now?"

"That's right," the leader's red eyes gleamed with sympathy and he pawed at the ground gloomily. "But we can go over everything later, it's getting late and you're Clan is probably worried about you."

“My Clan!” I gasped, that’s right an entire day has passed since I returned to the camp. Whirling around, I quickly dashed forward, willing myself to go faster than I ever have before. I tore through the forest, my paws barely touching the ground as I ran. Skidding to a halt, the forest debris arcing around me, I stood in front of the camp. I almost smiled when I realized I wasn’t breathing heavily, normally such a run would have triggered my disease but instead I wasn’t even out of breath.

“It isn’t that amazing,” the silver tabby snarled in my ear, causing my fur to fluff out in surprise and I shot him a withering glare. He returned my gaze coolly before smirking bitterly at me.

I didn’t bother to respond and instead slipped into the camp, how much time did the Clan waste worrying about me? I swallowed nervously, what would I tell them? I guess I could just tell them that I had an attack, no need to add in the whole dying and suddenly being revived part.

“Juniperpaw!” Rosethorn cried as I entered the clearing, she rushed over to me and lovingly rubbed against me. “Where were you, I was so worried…” she trailed off, looking at something behind me. Twirling around, I froze as I saw the three mysterious cats entering. “Who are you?” my mother bristled and her voice suddenly had a sharp edge to it. “What do you want?”

“We mean no harm,” the ginger-and-black cat exclaimed, remaining calm as more cats started to approach us. “We wish to speak with your leader.”

“What do you want?” Sweetstar asked as she wove through the crowd, coming to stand face to face with the three.

“We merely wish to join your Clan,” it was the black cat that spoke this time, her voice relaxed and her eyes neutral. “If you will have us.”

Sweetstar studied them thoughtfully, before turning away. “I will discuss this with some of my warriors; we will come up with a decision by dawn.”

“Thank you,” the ginger-and-black cat dipped his head in

gratitude.

"Russetleaf, Brightstream, Sharpfang, Twilightberry," Sweetstar gestured towards her den before stalking away, the deputy and the three older warriors following her.

"Juniperpaw, you should get some rest," Rosethorn meowed and I nodded silently, slowly I turned and headed for my den. It was rather odd how, despite being late into the night, I felt no exhaustion. What else had changed about me?

"Hope you don't mind if we stay with you until you're leaders decision," the red-eyed cat meowed as he padded up to me, his two companions close behind him.

"That's fine by me," I shrugged. "By the way, I don't believe you've told me your names yet."

"That's right, I'm Wandering Bird, but you can just call me Bird," he then turned towards the others and gestured towards the black she-cat. "That's Eternal Night, just call her Night, and that's Jaded Soul, although he prefers just Soul."

"It's nice to meet you, I'm-"

"Juniperpaw," Soul finished. "The Shadow told us."

"Of course it knew my name," I growled, feeling like I had been spied on. It made my stomach churn at the thought and I wondered if maybe he was watching me even now. We entered my den, and I turned to face the three of them. "Tell me about The Shadow."

"Very well," Bird padded away from the entrance and sat down, covering his paws with his fluffy tail. "The Shadow is an immortal being, able to grant wishes to us living down on the earth. But every wish he grants always comes with a price, the price varying in severity depending on the wish."

"When he healed you," Night picked up the conversation, her voice cold as she spoke. "He cured you of your illness, which in return took away the hearing on one ear and the sight of one eye.

However, he also resurrected you which caused for another fee that must be paid. This fee is that you will be his loyal servant for all of eternity."

Night paused as I stared, wide eyed with terror, at her. My paws started to shake and the fur along my spine bristled. "What do you mean by that?" I whispered; dread washing through me as I waited for their response.

"As The Shadow's servants, we travel the world doing his bidding," Soul exclaimed, his eyes burning with anger at the thought. "Whatever he wants we must do or risk punishment, and I would suggest you don't ask just exactly the penalty would be 'cause you don't want to know."

I took in a shaky breath, what had I gotten myself into? "I'm going to have to leave my Clan," it wasn't a question, a flat statement as the heavy truth weighed down on me. When would I have to leave? My Clan needed me right now, but what if I would have to leave the next day? But then again, these cats had ended up joining the Clan, which must mean I would be staying for a while longer.

"Once we complete your training, then we'll leave," Bird meowed, startling me out of my dark thoughts. How long would that take? Bird studied me thoughtfully before adding. "It will probably take quite a while; The Shadow wants his servants to be capable."

I nodded and took in a deep breath, I had chosen this path. "When the time comes I'll leave," I exclaimed meekly, but when the time comes, I'll make sure that my Clan will be fully prepared. No matter what, I will not leave my Clan without a medicine cat.

Chapter 21 (Whisppaw)

Dread roared through me as I took a step back, I was aware of a puddle of blood lapping at my paws but I didn't turn around. My gaze was focused on the shadowy figure in front of me, a blood having splattered against his fur and his golden eyes gleamed with insanity. I didn't want to die! I tensed as he slowly crouched and started towards me, stalking me like prey. Holding my breath, I closed my eyes and braced myself for a flash of searing pain.

I shot out of my nest, moss flying everywhere and glanced around wildly. There was no blood, no crazed cat in front of me, just my sleeping clan mates curled up in their moss beds. Forcing my breathing to return back to normal, I sat back down. Petalpaw, who was sleeping nearby, stared at me thoughtfully. "A nightmare?" she whispered softly.

"Yes," I laid back down and she gave me a sympathetic smile.

"Want to go for a walk?" she slowly sat up and looked at the den's exit. "A walk is always nice after a nightmare."

"Yeah, a walk sounds nice," standing up, I carefully wove around the sleeping learners before going out into the cool night. Petalpaw soon joined me and she fluffed out her pure white fur as a gentle but cold zephyr blew over us. "Leaf-bare is approaching," I stated.

"Ugh," Petalpaw curled her lip. "I hate the snow."

"Maybe it won't snow too much," I suggested as we started for the camp exit. "Although I like how the snow looks on the tree branches."

"Only good thing about the icky white stuff is that it's pretty and even that is questionable," Petalpaw snorted.

I rolled my eyes before playfully nipping at Petalpaw's ear,

with a huge grin I dashed off as my friend bolted after me. We wove through the trees, dodging each other's blows before my paw got caught on a well hidden tree root and I went tumbling forward. "Whisppaw, are you okay!" Petalpaw gasped and she quickly ran up to my side, her pink eyes gleaming with concern.

"Yeah I'm fine," I pushed myself off the ground and shook forest debris out of my pelt. Glancing around, I gulped as I stared at the rushing river just inches from where I had landed. That had been a close one.

"We've came pretty far," Petalpaw turned her gaze towards the river. "Want to head back now?"

"Yeah that would be nice," I nodded and turned to leave when I felt the ground underneath me tremble. I froze, as I listened as large chunks of dirt splashed into the water. "It's not very stable, we should be careful."

Nodding, Petalpaw slowly edged forward and a sigh of relief rushed out of her when her paws met more solid land. I started to follow her, when just like that the ground crumbled and I was plummeting rapidly towards the fast river. I let out a howl, before strong jaws clasped onto my scruff and halted my fall.

"Whisppaw are you okay?" Petalpaw called over the loud roar of the river, I could hear the worry as well as the relief in her voice. But wait, that meant someone else had caught me. Who was the one who saved me? I wish I could get a better look, but I didn't want to risk moving besides, I would find out once I was no longer hanging over a foaming river. I felt a tug as my savior slowly pulled me up, my fear of falling and drowning slowly edging away each time I was yanked closer to the ridge of solid ground.

I was so close when soil cascaded around me and suddenly I was falling again. Twisting slightly in the air, I caught a glimpse of sandy-gray colored fur and stifled a gasp. Sandpaw? He was the one who tried to save me? I struck the water, its cold waves sucking me beneath the surface as I was whisked away.

I paddled uselessly against the cold water, struggling to

surface but its currents kept me under. My fur was drenched, heavy fur dragging me even farther down. Finally I breached the surface and greedily sucked in air before I was forced under again. I was lost in the murky water with no way of knowing which way was up and which was down. I had no land that I could climb onto, for the ground towered over the river, and I wasn't fortunate enough to happen upon a log.

I emerged from the depths again but the relief that ran through me was short lived when the back of my head slammed into a rock. I was briefly aware of the sharp pain that rushed through my head before I slipped out of consciousness.

Epilogue

Spiritpaw

At the crack of dawn on the third day, we set out. The queens and kits, as well as any elders, stayed in the center while the rest of the Clan surrounded them. I could feel it deep inside that this journey would not be an easy one, and I couldn't help but wonder how many Clanmates will die before reaching the next camp.

Glancing over my shoulder, I stared at the place I had called home since arriving to this wretched Clan. For some reason I felt slightly empty at the thought of leaving this place, it was the only place I knew since kithood. "Spiritpaw, promise not to push yourself," Orangepaw meowed as she joined me, her eyes gleaming with concern. "If you ever feel tired or weak, just tell me and I'll help you."

"I'll be fine," I assured, I already felt much stronger since I first woke up. Still, my wounds continued to sting and I was just now starting to get used to the fact that half of my ear had been torn off. If this journey is a long one, how long will I be able to last?

Jadepaw

I sat outside of the healer's den, watching as the able cats worked on rebuilding the center's collapsed nests. I felt guilty at the thought of just watching, but what would someone with a bunch of broken ribs be able to do anyways? I heard the den's entrance shifting before Talia slowly joined me, the empty socket where her eye normally would be covered in cobwebs. She didn't say anything, just sat beside me as she watched the progress.

"Talia, it's good to see you up and moving," Owl greeted as he walked up to us, I watched him curiously as his tail twitched nervously. What was he so nervous about? "I need to tell you something…" he glanced around, eyeing the center cats nervously.

“Can we talk inside the den, Jadepaw you’re welcome to hear this as well.”

We filed into the medicine cat den and Owl gestured for us to get comfortable. Sitting down on my nest, I curled my tail over my paws while wandering if this conversation would be a long one or not. “Talia, Jadepaw, I am not who you think I am…”

Juniperpaw

I carefully slipped out of the camp, making sure no one saw me, as I wondered out into the forest. Since the time The Shadow brought me back, I never slept and I found out that I didn’t have to eat as well. The nights were long and lonely, my thoughts being my only companion until the sun rose into the dark sky. It felt good to sneak out of the camp, and to watch as the pitch black sky slowly turned bright as the sun’s rays appeared.

Sitting in a clearing I had discovered a few days ago, I sat staring up at the endless sky as the black sky started to gleam with bright oranges, reds and yellows. I turned my attention towards someone fast approaching, it was Bird. “Do you enjoy to watch the sunrise as well?” he greeted as he joined me.

I didn’t bother to respond as I silently watched the sun slowly drift up into the sky. It was a new dawn, yet I felt like the dark night would always continue.

Whisppaw

I let out a soft moan as my eyes slowly cracked open, I was lying on a pebbly shore while gentle waves lapped at my hind paws. Coughing I forced myself up and winced when the world spun rapidly while my head throbbed painfully. Quickly sitting down, I surveyed my surroundings. Where was I? I let out a gasp as I spotted a limp sodden figure a few fox-lengths away. “Sandpaw!” leaping to my paws, despite my throbbing head and the spinning, I wobbled over to him. He didn’t stir, just lay their limp and unmoving.